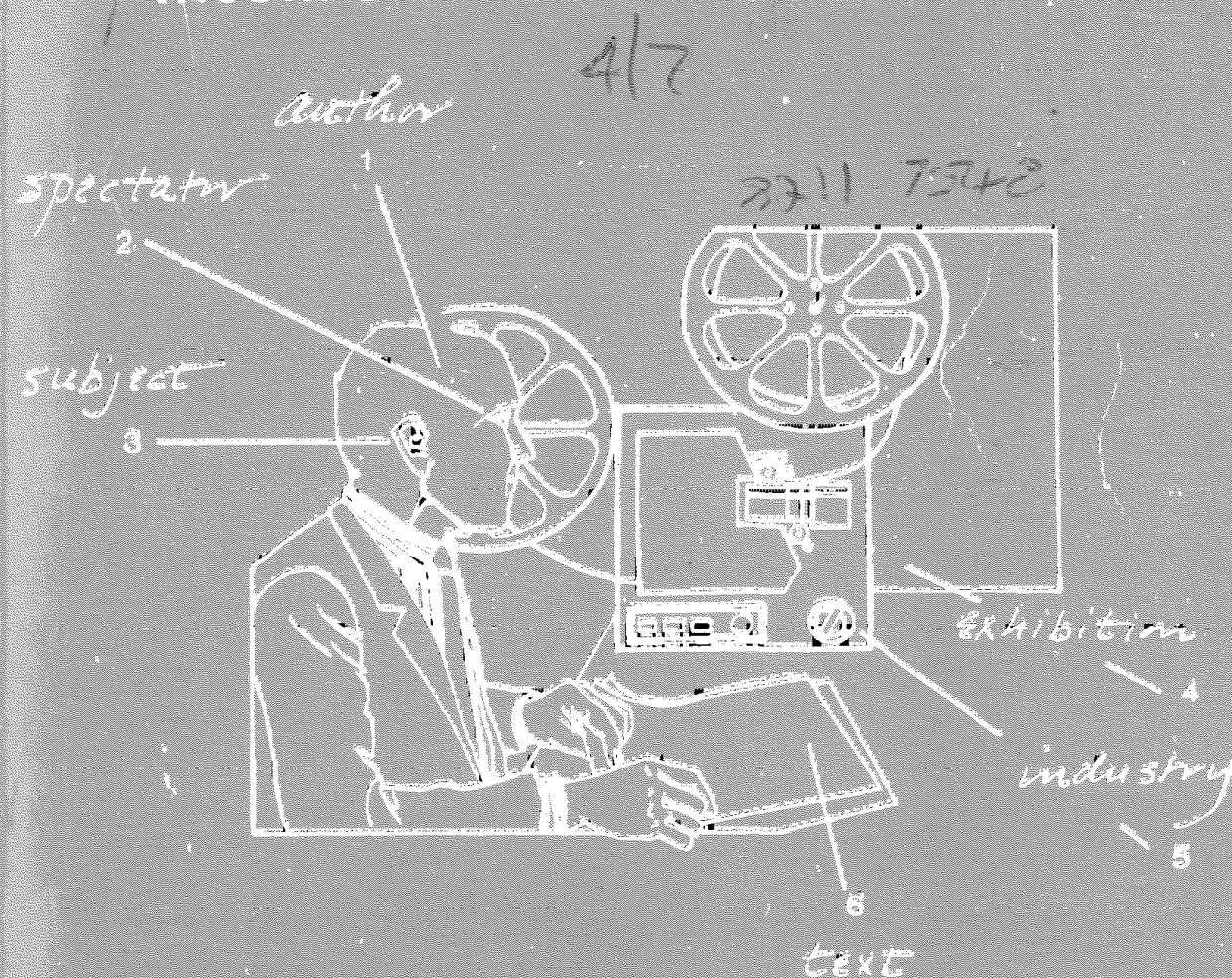


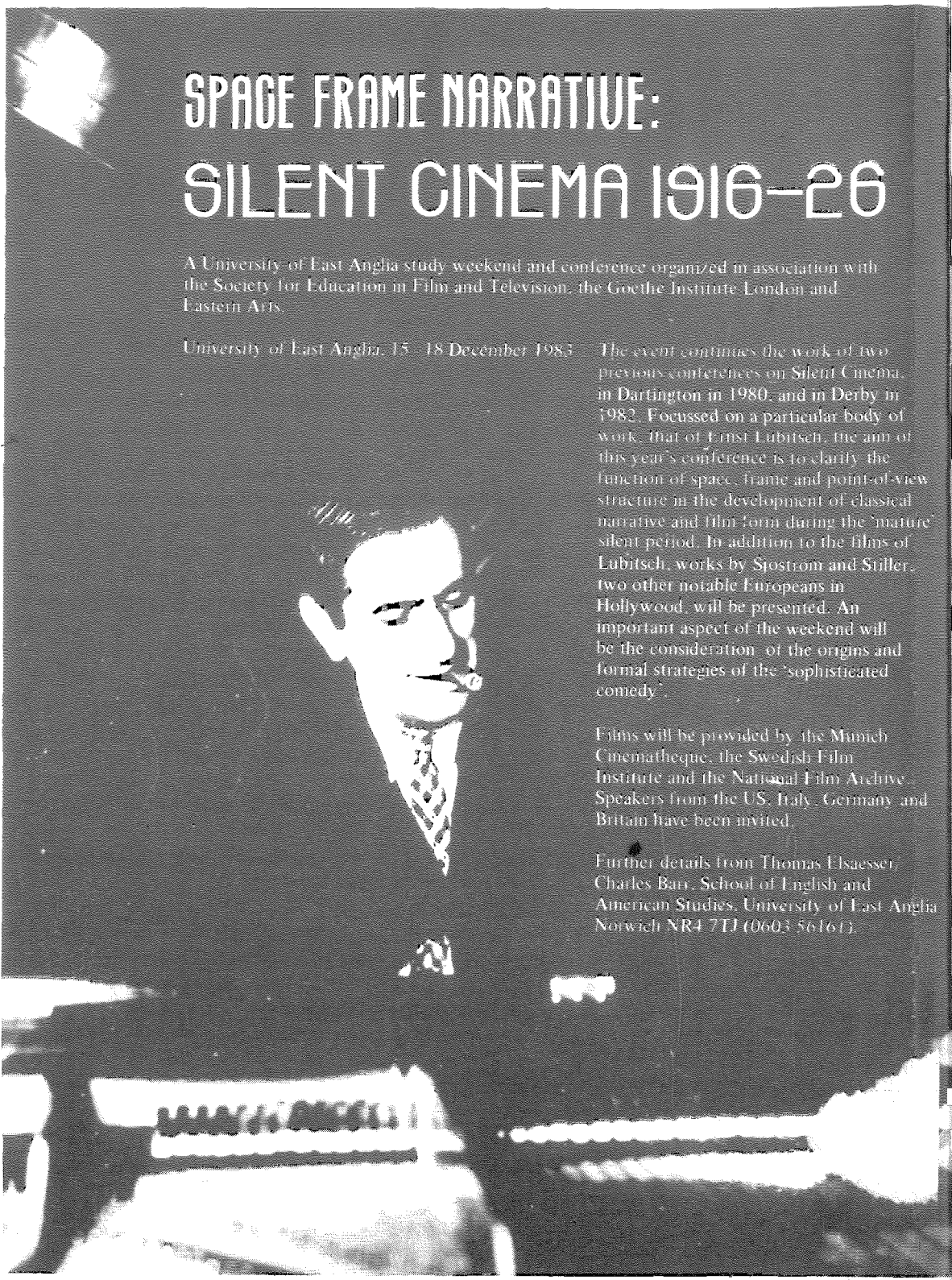
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SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION



SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE



SPACE FRAME NARRATIVE: SILENT CINEMA 1916-26

A University of East Anglia study weekend and conference organized in association with the Society for Education in Film and Television, the Goethe Institute London and Eastern Arts.

University of East Anglia, 15-18 December 1983

The event continues the work of two previous conferences on Silent Cinema, in Dartington in 1980, and in Derby in 1982. Focussed on a particular body of work, that of Ernst Lubitsch, the aim of this year's conference is to clarify the function of space, frame and point-of-view structure in the development of classical narrative and film form during the 'mature' silent period. In addition to the films of Lubitsch, works by Spoto and Stiller, two other notable Europeans in Hollywood, will be presented. An important aspect of the weekend will be the consideration of the origins and formal strategies of the 'sophisticated comedy'.

Films will be provided by the Munich Cinematheque, the Swedish Film Institute and the National Film Archive. Speakers from the US, Italy, Germany and Britain have been invited.

Further details from Thomas Elsaesser, Charles Barr, School of English and American Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ (0603 56161).

EDITORIAL

One consequence of the merger of *Screen* and *Screen Education* and the move to bi-monthly publication has been the increasing choice of specific 'themes' around which to commission and construct each issue of the magazine. Thus, for example, the 1982 double issue (vol 23 no 3-4) addressed the question of 'Sex and Spectatorship' and produced a range of approaches to a single cultural/political problematic. There is always a danger, however, that excellent material which falls outside such 'themes' can be indefinitely postponed by such a system, while pertinent topical pieces (inherently impossible to predict, let alone commission, at long range) are inevitably excluded. Furthermore, such a strategy risks setting an inflexible agenda for film and television studies.

It was, therefore, decided quite early in the gestation of this issue that it would not be thematically conceived. The advantage of this strategy include a heterogeneity at the levels of both method and object. Moreover, by building on the work done by SEFT's journals in the past we hope this issue in particular and *Screen* in general will continue to represent a wide range of critical writing about the practices and institutions of the media and media education. Here we refer both to theoretical work generated within academic institutions and shorter, more polemical, review articles about key or symptomatic publications, educational events and developments of importance within the fields of film, television and education.

Nevertheless, specific thematic clusters do emerge from a reading of this issue, most notably the urgent question of National Culture. This is addressed in relation to Britain in the articles by Carl Gardner and John Wyver, Robert Murphy, Simon Blanchard, Andrew Higson and Caroline Merz and in relation to Italy and Germany by Sam

Rohdie and Thomas Elsaesser respectively. Simon Blanchard's observations about the tired clichés of a British cinema – resuscitated in the wake of the Oscar-laden *Chariots of Fire* and *Ghandi* and further fuelled by the rhetoric of the Falklands and the Tory landslide – suggest not only that that rebirth is a fiction, but that the national culture out of which a national cinema must necessarily emerge is itself an ideological construct, a necessary precondition for the return of box office monies from abroad where 'Britishness' is presently a precious, if precarious, commodity. Higson's review indeed raises crucial questions about why certain texts have been – and continue to be – privileged in this pantheon of Britishness. The articles by Janet Staiger and Paul Kerr, on the other hand, address an equally problematic national cinema – that of Hollywood – and the fact that it is seldom seen as such is of considerable interest. Their focus is Hollywood in the period of transition from the vertically integrated studio system to 'independence' – a Hollywood against whose imperialism many European and Third World cinemas define(d) themselves and yet whose product, culturally undervalued in the US itself, found its first defenders abroad. Paul Gilroy's article on black broadcasting develops the critique of a single univocal national culture and at the same time cautions against the cosy assumption that a simple single alternative to a dominant culture can be unproblematically assembled from the cultures of 'minorities', ethnic or implicitly otherwise.

Another area of investigation which crosscuts many of the articles in this issue is the relationship between individual texts and the institutional contexts in which they are produced and 'received'. To what extent, for instance, can specific texts be said to have been determined by industrial constraints? To what extent is the operation of any text in excess of the circumstances of its production? Kerr, for example, argues that the elements in the films of Joseph H Lewis which critics have isolated in attempts to elevate 'Lewis' into a pantheon of Hollywood auteurs are precisely those which were encouraged by the production strategies of the 'ambitious B' picture. Higson, on the other hand, argues against the deployment of an over-deterministic sociological model which is liable to ignore the operations of specific texts, repressing their particular productions of meaning and pleasure. Elsaesser's remarks, not only on the social

and economic climate of Weimar cinema in which Pabst's *Pandora's Box* was produced but also on the changing critical constructions it has received over the years, implicitly demonstrate that the meanings produced by a text are often contradictory, never fixed and cannot be reduced to the context in which they are produced. Finally, the re-examination of biopics, British film in World War II and early cinema in the weekend events reviewed here provides examples of the ways in which the meanings of texts can be transformed in another arena—that of education.

Meanwhile this issue of *Screen* reflects our continuing concern with a number of the key debates which figured in the pages of SEFT's journals

throughout the '70s and which remain on the agenda: questions about realism, about 'progressiveness', about authorship and genre, about determination, about Hollywood, about Art Cinema and about the space of and for independence.

This issue also marks the arrival of several new members to the Editorial Board. We welcome them and extend our thanks for the work of the retiring members. Among those newly elected to the Board was the London organiser of the Independent Film-makers' Association, Mary Bos. Very sadly, Mary died in June of an illness she had borne for several years with great fortitude. We share her friends' and colleagues' loss.

MICK EATON AND PAUL KERR

SEFT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is given of the 32nd Annual General Meeting of the Society for Education in Film and Television, to be held in London on Saturday, December 10, 1983. Nominations for election to the positions of Chairperson, Treasurer and 18 Executive Committee Members should be received at the Society's offices, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1, no later than October 14, 1983. Nominees, proposers and seconders must all be members of the Society.

SCREEN

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LULU AND THE METER MAN

LOUISE BROOKS, PABST AND
'PANDORA'S BOX' –
BY THOMAS ELSAESSER

I

¹ Quoted in James Card, 'The Intense Isolation of Louise Brooks', *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1958, p 241.

² Godard's references for this film were Renoir's *Nana*, Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* and Pabst's *Lulu*. Pabst himself has been quoted as being inspired by Dreyer's film.

³ According to contemporary sources, all reference to an incestuous relation between Alwa and Lulu, a homosexual relation between father and son, a lesbian relation between Lulu and Countess Geschwitz were removed by appropriate cuts and a change of intertitles.

FOR SEVERAL DECADES, GW Pabst's film, *Die Büchse der Pandora/Pandora's Box* (1928-29) was practically unavailable, except as one of the very special treasures of Henri Langlois' Cinemathèque in Paris. The star of the film, Louise Brooks, an actress from Wichita, Kansas, was to have one of the most enigmatic careers in film history. After the release of the two films she made with Pabst (the other one is *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen/The Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1929) she became a Paris cult figure in 1930, but on returning to Hollywood she virtually ceased appearing in films, and literally became a 'lost one'. Langlois' infatuation with Louise Brooks made him feature a huge blow-up of her face – by then barely recognised by anyone – at the entrance of his 1955 'Sixty Years of Cinema' exhibition:

*Those who have seen her can never forget her. She is the modern actress par excellence because, like the statues of antiquity, she is outside of time... She is the intelligence of the cinematographic process, she is the most perfect incarnation of photogenie; she embodies in herself all that the cinema rediscovered in its last years of silence: complete naturalness and complete simplicity.*¹

Among those who could never forget Louise Brooks after Langlois' screenings of her films were Jean-Luc Godard (paying homage to Lulu in *Vivre Sa Vie*, 1962²), and James Card, curator of Film at the George Eastman House, Rochester. He went in search of Louise Brooks in New York, found her in almost squalid circumstances, and brought her to live in Rochester, on a small Eastman House stipend. While he encouraged her to write and take an interest in her own past, he also tracked down and restored *Pandora's Box*, so that we now possess the image of Louise Brooks in this film as it had been seen by her first audience.

Pandora's Box was not a commercial success, and in the United States, for instance, only a cut and censored version³ was briefly in circulation,

at a time when the new phenomenon of the talkies eclipsed and consigned to oblivion many of the more outstandingly modern films of the last silent period. In Germany, the film was widely shown and discussed, but Pabst was attacked on several fronts. Even his most consistent supporter, Harry M Potamkin, was disappointed and found the film 'atmosphere without content'.⁴ About Louise Brook's performance a Berlin critic wrote: 'Louise Brooks cannot act. She does not suffer, she does nothing.'⁵

A good deal of criticism tried to prove Pabst's shortcomings as an adaptor of Wedekind's plays, and complained about the film industry's general temerity of turning a literary classic into a silent film with nothing but laconic intertitles.

*Lulu is inconceivable without the words that Wedekind makes her speak. These eternally passion-laden, eruptive, indiscriminating, hard, sentimental and unaffected words stand out clearly against her figure.... The film is unable to reproduce the discrepancy between Lulu's outward appearance, and her utterance.*⁶

This assessment is contradicted by Siegfried Kracauer, who writes in his book *From Caligari to Hitler*:

*A failure it was, but not for the reason most critics advanced.... The film's weakness resulted not so much from the impossibility of translating (the) dialogue into cinematic terms, as from the abstract nature of the whole Wedekind play.... Pabst blundered in choosing a play that because of its expressive mood belonged to the fantastic postwar era rather than to the realistic stabilising period.*⁷

The almost unanimously unfavourable response to the film is interesting in several respects. Even if we can assume special pleading on the part of the literary establishment, busy safeguarding its own territory⁸, the various complaints outline an ideologically and aesthetically coherent position. It goes right to the heart of the film's special interest within Weimar attitudes to sexuality, class and the representation of women in literature and the visual arts. For the passages quoted are indicative of a resistance that, on the one hand, has to do with the difference between literary language and body language ('utterance'/'appearance') – reminiscent of more recent discussions in the area of sexual difference between speaking and being spoken as a subject in language. On the other hand, there is an evident irritation that Louise Brooks is neither active ('she does nothing'), nor actively passive ('she does not suffer') which contrasts unfavourably one kind of body – that of cinematic representation – with another, the expressive body of the theatre performance. Compare this to Langlois' '(her) art is so pure that it becomes invisible': praise that implies a diametrically opposite visual (and literary) aesthetic.

Pabst's choice of an American actress for the part caused consternation among German film-stars. It gives the issue a further dimension if one considers it within the large-scale emigration of German film-makers to

⁴ H M Potamkin, 'Pabst and the Social Film', *Hound and Horn*, January-March 1933.

⁵ Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood*, Praeger, New York 1982, p 95.

⁶ A Kraszna Krausz, 'G W Pabst's Lulu', *Close Up*, April 1929, p 27.

⁷ S Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1947, p 178-9.

⁸ An inverse judgement can be found in Kenneth Tynan's profile of Louise Brooks: 'Pandora's Box belongs among the few films that have succeeded in improving on a theatrical chef-d'oeuvre.' in 'Dream Woman of the Cinema', *Observer Magazine*, November 11, 1979, p 38.

⁹ Louise Brooks op cit, p 95.

¹⁰ John Willett, *The New Sobriety*, Thames and Hudson, London 1978 p. 10.

¹¹ Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History* (I am using the German edition, Ullstein, 1977, p 10, which carries the famous Blue Angel still as its cover).

Hollywood, the economic difficulties of the German film industry after the 1927 crash and especially UFA and Nero's bid to break into the American market. But ideological attitudes towards America also played their part. Louise Brooks recalls a telling incident:

As we left the theatre (at the opening of an UFA film, at the Gloria Palast, and Pabst) hurried me through a crowd of hostile moviegoers, I heard a girl saying something loud and nasty. In the cab, I began pounding his knee, insisting, 'What did she say? What did she say?' Finally, he translated: 'That is the American girl who is playing our German Lulu'.⁹

Kracauer's comments rather simplify this whole ideological and aesthetic complex, with his implied juxtaposition of Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* ('New Objectivity'), but as so often, he has recognised a crucial tension in the film—even if, calling Pabst's choice of subject a blunder, he overlooks the extent to which the film actually reinterprets the inner relationship between Expressionism and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, since this 'American' Lulu gives Pabst a vantage point on *both* Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, as well as on the fundamental shift that the cinema (compared to the theatre) has brought to the representation of sex and class, libidinal and political economy.

II

When one wants to understand the place of the cinema in Weimar society and culture, Kracauer's work is still essential reading, even though it appears different now from the book it was when first published in 1946. Historians of Weimar culture consider the cinema as part of what makes Weimar Weimar, but they are certainly far from giving it the privileged status that Kracauer allows it, that of unlocking the *Zeitgeist*, the ever-elusive essence of an epoch. John Willett gives an apt summary in *The New Sobriety*:

There are existing studies that deal with the culture of the Weimar Republic between 1918-1933 much more broadly. 'When we think of Weimar', writes Peter Gay in the preface to his Weimar Culture, 'we think of the Three-penny Opera, The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, The Magic Mountain, the Bauhaus, Marlene Dietrich.' More recently, that other eminent historian Walter Laqueur has defined its Zeitgeist in very similar terms as 'the Bauhaus, The Magic Mountain, Professor Heidegger and Dr Caligari'.¹⁰

Laqueur, however, had added a proviso:

The fact that Marlene Dietrich has not been forgotten in 1974, while many of her contemporaries have faded from memory, need not necessarily mean that future historians of the cinema will have to share the preferences and prejudices of our time.¹¹

I take this as an invitation to talk about Lulu, rather than Lola Lola.

The cinema is part of the colourful mosaic of the Zeitgeist, providing an easily recognisable iconography, the period flavour, or – again in John Willett's words – important mainly for its 'atmospheric, essentially nostalgic relevance'¹². Such is the general view, and it implies an idea of cultural diametrically opposed to that of Kracauer, for whom the cinema was not an addition, among the many forms of entertainment that flourished (Laqueur's account of Weimar cinema is the last part of a chapter called 'Berlin s'amuse') but its hidden centre. A period thinks, compulso-represents and interprets itself – and its contradictions – in all the products of its social life, and among the means of self-representation, the cinema had for Kracauer an absolutely preeminent function. In this respect, Kracauer had already applied the lessons of structural analysis and social anthropology, and as Adorno put it: 'his way of considering the cinema (as a cipher of social tendencies) has long since become common property, so much so that it is practically an unquestioned assumption underlying any serious reflection on the medium in general.'¹³

No fundamentally new or different history of the Weimar cinema has thus appeared since Kracauer's socio-psychological study of the 'secret history involving the inner dispositions of the German people'¹⁴. And this despite the fact that in the field of economic film history particularly, and also textual criticism, many new perspectives have been opened up. The general impact has been that in the intervening time, scholars have become more careful in specifying who – that is, what class, what group – represented itself or was addressed, when 'going to the movies' became a regular habit. A somewhat different understanding of the nature and origin of German fascism has also made it less urgent to read '(the) disclosure of these dispositions through the medium of the German screen' primarily as a 'help in the understanding of Hitler's ascent and ascendancy'.¹⁵

Today, Kracauer is the historian of the social and sexual imaginary – the structures of anxiety, desire and denegation – that constituted the identity of the German lower middle class. They made up the bulk of the cinema-goers at the Gloria Palast and all the other high-street movie-palaces in Berlin and other German cities. What his book attempts, in a language that borrows some of its key analytical terms from Freudian and Adlerian psychoanalysis – regression, hysteria, impotence, compulsion, sublimation, instinct – is a metaphoric description of a dominant personality-type, whose characteristics are that he is male, paranoiac and masochistic, with repressed homosexual objects of identification. He experiences class barriers as insurmountable, and upward mobility a desire tantamount to parricide, punishable by social *déclassement*, a fate that, like the sword of Damocles, hangs over his head in any case. Kracauer offers a number of reasons why this class and its dominant character-type is representative for 'the German people' generally, and why it is reasonable to assume this to be the target audience of the films:

¹² John Willett op cit, p 10.

¹³ T W Adorno, 'Siegfried Kracauer tot', in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 1, 1966, quoted in K Witte (ed), *Siegfried Kraucauer Kino*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1974, p 265.

¹⁴ S Kracauer, op cit, p 11.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ See, for instance, Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1981.

¹⁸ Patricia Mellencamp, 'Oedipus and the Robot', in *Enclitic*, vol 5 no 1, p 25.

¹⁹ cf Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, Rowohlt Reinbek, 1980.

In a study published in 1930 (*Die Angestellten*) I pointed out the pronounced 'white collar' pretensions of the bulk of German employees, whose economic and social status in reality bordered on that of the workers, or was even inferior to it. Although these lower middle-class people could no longer hope for bourgeois security, they scorned all doctrines and ideals more in harmony with their plight, maintaining attitudes that had lost any basis in reality.¹⁶

Kracauer's emphasis on personality-structure and psychoanalysis implies a double thesis: firstly, that political and economic life have a shaping effect on the 'logic' of psychic development, and secondly, that cinematic fictional narrative is a particularly efficient way of crystallising dispositions into attitudes. The two theses have a separate theoretical status, as recent debates make only too clear.¹⁷ Or, one can interpret the implications as a feminist as done:

*From Caligari to Hitler consistently and repetitiously depicts... a national, middle-class, Oedipal/familial failure peculiar to Germany and its cinema... Beneath its sociological pretense is a perverse discourse on sexuality... (The) argument places the blame on the domestic family, or historically, patriarchy..., a massive failure of the family to properly inscribe males into the symbolic of paternal order.*¹⁸

That definitions of masculinity and male identity were in crisis during the Weimar years is not especially new: Peter Gay more or less built the thesis of his book around the father-son conflicts of Expressionist literature and drama. When Walter Laqueur says the opposite about the cinema ('one looks in vain, among German films, for the father-son conflict so prominent on the stage') he indicates either a very literal understanding of the motif, or that he has not looked very far, even in Kracauer. Current studies about 'male fantasies' in the literary and semi-literary products of the time, have continued to explore the manifestations of male paranoia and repressed homosexuality.¹⁹

But what Kracauer also argues is that the depictions of Oedipal conflicts and their modes of narrative resolution in the films are so paranoid and perverse because they are a 'screen', a field of projection and a compensation for objectively insoluble political contradictions and immovable class barriers. Sexuality – always an overdetermined cultural code – becomes the site for the representation of highly ambiguous fears (ambiguous, because libidinally charged) about any social existence outside the bourgeois order, outside the law, outside the hierarchical markers of identity and difference recognised by the middle class. This is not to say that the representation of sexual conflict, or the many family tragedies in the Weimar cinema simply substitute themselves for the 'real' tragedy of class conflict and economic ruin. Such a view would imply an almost trivial understanding of the Freudian notion of the unconscious, and a serious confusion of levels. The bourgeois film of the Weimar period does indeed have a narrative structure whose symbolic code remains remarkably constant throughout the '20s: it is Kracauer's

achievement to have pointed this out. But it does not follow from this that the class conflicts of the period are structured in strict analogy to the stages of the Oedipal conflict. If the various revolutions on the Left failed, it is not because its militants were held back by castration anxiety. However, it is quite another matter if in the fictional and ideological discourses of the period, sexuality and the family become symbolic sites for the construction of political ideology.

To give a historical example. In 1925 the Austrian newspaper editor and writer, Hugo Bettauer, author of *Die Freudlose Gasse* (*The Street of Sorrow*, adapted by GW Pabst, and filmed the same year) was assassinated in Vienna. He had been the popular editor of *Bettauers Wochenschrift*, a journal of progressive social views advocating free love. He was also a Jew. His assassin, a 20-year-old, unemployed, first-generation immigrant from Czechoslovakia, had proven connections with the Austrian Nazi Party and was an avid reader of millenarian political tracts. The trial, which incidentally acquitted him, was entirely preoccupied with the question of whether Bettauer's journal was pornographic and morally corrupting. The young man claimed that it was, and that he had acted spontaneously, out of moral outrage. The jury essentially accepted his plea. What seems interesting in the case is that in a social climate rife with class, ethnic, and party-political conflict and close to civil war, sexuality is the preferred field on which ideological conflict and difference can legitimate itself, to the point of justifying politically and ethnically motivated assassination. Otto Rothstock did not kill in Bettauer the symbolic father, but he did find in sexual outrage a subject position that sufficiently unified the contradictions of his social existence (non-integrated minority, unemployment, ambitions towards gentility) in order for him to act in what seemed to him a politically meaningful way. On his side, Hugo Bettauer, a sex-and-crime formula novelist, found in the sexological articles he published a lucrative market among the semi-literary bourgeoisie for his socially progressive views. For him, too, sexuality implied a political and moral position. The assassin supported his confused political aspirations by modelling himself on particularly rigid conceptions of sexuality and sexual difference. The victim, on the other hand, supported different though perhaps also vague and indeterminate political goals and views with an inverse, open, 'free' conception of sexuality and individual identity.

To what extent then, one might want to ask, did the very existence of Freudian psychoanalysis and the many sexological investigations that emerged in its shadow and vicinity give the question of sexuality a different social space? Did they reinforce, or on the contrary, limit the kind of metaphoric haemorrhage that make the period's ideologies of race, of power and authority, of State and the Law, of the Soul and the Will, seem to us so many versions of the same 'perverse discourse on sexuality'? An intense curiosity focused on Woman is undeniable, but it antedates the Weimar period. Freud's hesitations, and his cautious remarks about the 'dark continent' of female sexuality were not always heeded by his followers: definitions of the 'nature' of Woman proliferated; precisely

²⁰ *Erdgeist* was published in 1895, *Die Büchse der Pandora* in 1904. For a brief sociological analysis of Wedekind's Lulu, see Frank Galassi, 'The Lumpen Drama of Frank Wedekind', in *Praxis*, Spring 1975, p 84-87.

because in search of an elusive essence, femininity was so often construed in the negative or oppositional image of a masculinity in crisis. Structurally related to the endless father-son conflicts, where male sexuality appears in its most classically Oedipal fixations, and where women are either terrified bystanders or non-existent, one finds in Weimar culture also the sexually predatory and aggressive woman – phallic mothers, on whom the male subject projects both castration anxieties and masochistic fantasies. But there is a third possibility – and this one seems to me relevant for *Pandora's Box* – rarely in evidence in either the avant-garde or the 'serious literature' of the time and nonetheless perhaps the single most striking characteristic of its popular culture: sexual ambiguity, androgyny, the play with sexual roles and the fascination attached to the realm between male and female – Isherwood's Berlin, if you like, but also Magnus Hirschfeld's research institute. Yet it documents itself most vividly in the cabarets and the variety-shows, the fashion pages or the photography and drawings in quality magazines for a popular audience, like *Die Dame*. Pabst's Lulu – this is the question – is she the demonic female or a Weimar flapper?

III

The figure of Lulu that Wedekind portrays in *Erdgeist* and *Die Büchse der Pandora*²⁰ superficially belongs to the tradition of the femme fatale, the sexually alluring but remote woman, through whom men experience the irrational, obsessional and ultimately destructive force of female sexuality. The social and historical dimension of the figure is too complex to be discussed here, but many of the literary or visual embodiments, especially in the late nineteenth century, project onto the desired woman an aggressiveness and destructiveness whose subjective correlative is guilt and self-punishment: for transgression, for violation, perhaps for desire itself. In Baudelaire, Huysmans, Gustave Moreau this figure is a stylisation and a character often from mythology (Salomé, Judith, the feminised Sphinx) whose location in the Orient and among the spoils of colonial wars or conquests gives a glimpse of a specifically political source of desire and guilt. In Strindberg, Munch or Klimt the figure is more a reminder of the violations of nature and instinctual life by the ascending bourgeois society and its consolidation of the family. With Wedekind, a specific social milieu, marked by class division, comes into view.

More explicitly than anyone else, he locates the question of sexuality within an ideological field. The repression of almost all manifestations of female sexuality entails an intense eroticism suffusing everything that is a-social, primitive, instinctual, according to a topos that sees nature as devouring whenever its nurturing function has been perverted. At the same time, Wedekind saw very precisely the relationship between social productivity and sexual productivity that the bourgeoisie had fought so hard to establish, and which lay at the heart of its 'sexual repression': it

was the energy that had to be subjected to the labour-process, regulated and accounted for. The bourgeois subject, for whom sexual passion is nothing but the reverse of all the frustrations that make up his social and moral existence, is contrasted with the members of the lumpenproletariat – those outside, unassimilable or scornful when it comes to the bourgeois' dialectic of renunciation and productivity.

By locating a deviant, instinctual and liberating social behaviour among circus people, artistes, petty criminals, and calling it sexual passion, Wedekind builds a fragile bridge with another class that also felt itself outside the bourgeois order, the declining aristocracy against whose notions of libertinage, of productivity and non-production, of waste and display, the codes of the bourgeoisie once developed themselves. A non-repressive sexuality thus becomes the utopia where the lumpen-class and the aristocracy meet in mutual tolerance and indulgence: the cliché situation of so many Viennese operettas and popular literature fantasies, the ones that served film directors from Stroheim to Ophuls.

This kind of identification cannot maintain itself other than as a projection that also invests the 'other' with the attributes that the self lacks. The attraction of the *bourgeois* for the lumpenproletariat, however, arises not from the similarity of position *vis-à-vis* a common antagonist, but out of an opposition. Wedekind's Lulu is without family ties, without social obligations, without education or culture. Her psychological existence is free of guilt and conscience, her physical existence the very image of beauty, youth and health. Being outside the social order, she belongs to 'nature' – the only non-social realm that the plays can envisage. Sexuality therefore constructs itself primarily through negative categories, where non-family equals amorality, and the non-social becomes the 'wild' on the animal level, or the tropical plant in the vegetal realm. Several layers of self-projection are superimposed, yet it is the sympathy of the aristocrat for the *lumpen* (one outcast for another) that provides the basis for the glamourisation of these negative, somewhat demonic categories.

To leave it at this, is to suggest a very schematic reading of the plays. Wedekind's Lulu is in a sense not only a more radical critique of bourgeois notions of sexuality, but also of the myth of the femme fatale itself. By critique I do not mean a denunciation or a persuasively argued case for or against. For Wedekind, Lulu is a construct, not a sociological portrait: she represents in all her manipulative deviousness the only constant value, set against the relativity and dissolution of the so-called absolute and transcendental values. This, one suspects, is also because Wedekind endows her with a kind of articulacy and energy that makes her the next-of-kin of another outcast altogether: the artist, traitor to his class – whether aristocratic or bourgeois. She voices not only the artist's disgust with the members of all classes, but with himself, which is why her predatory lust is allowed to vent itself against members of all constituted classes and convictions.²¹ Wedekind's notion of female sexuality is thus even more abstract and conceptual than that of the French decadents. As the guise that the artist gives himself, she is distant and alluring, devour-

²¹ In the play, Alwa Schoen makes the following observation: '... the curse on our literature today is that it is much too literary. We know of no other questions and problems than those that crop up among writers and intellectuals. We see no further in our art than the limits of our interests as a class. To find back to great and powerful art, we would have to move much more among people who have never read a book in their lives, and for whom the simplest animal instincts serve as a guide to their actions. I have tried to work along these lines in my play "Earth-Spirit", *Die Büchse der Pandora*, Act I (my translation).

²² 'When writing the part of Lulu, the main problem was to depict the body of a woman through the words she speaks. With every line of hers I asked myself, does it make her young and beautiful? ...', Wedekind, quoted in Artur Kutscher, *Wedekind Leben und Werk*, Paul List, Munich 1964, p. 128.

²³ Georg Lukacs, 'Thoughts on an Aesthetic for the Cinema' (1913), translated and reprinted in *Framework*, no 14, 1981, p. 3.

²⁴ According to Kutscher, op cit, p. 127, Wedekind told him that he had declared Geschwitz the tragic figure in the preface, because he hoped to deflect the legal objections to his play, raised at three successive trials in Berlin, Leipzig and again Berlin. However, very important is his conception of Geschwitz as 'non-nature', ie outside the binary opposition of social/natural and of gender-based sexual difference: 'What the courts did not object to was that I had made the terrible fate of being outside nature (Unnatürlichkeit) which this human

ing and irresistible. As a woman, she remains *terra incognita*. For Wedekind, the conflict between class and productivity, between class and sexuality resolves itself only through the intermediary of art, and of an art that understood its own productivity as a form of elemental, natural expressivity. Lulu is characterised by her expressivity, because she is conceived in response to a societal repressivity.²²

The space where such an expressivity could articulate itself is the theatre. Voice and gesture, thought and body could be unified in the performance and thus represent what one might call an image of non-alienated existence, the enactment of 'destiny as pure present',²³ even if Wedekind is careful to relativise the tragic pathos of his figure by such 'epic' devices as the prologue, the ringmaster and the animal imagery of the circus, as well as stating in the preface that Geschwitz, not Lulu, is the tragic figure.²⁴

IV

The cinema, however, is still silent. Its expressivity, the way it speaks to the mind and the senses is different, and different affective values attach themselves to gesture, decor or face. With it, the relation of expression to repression changes; conflict and contrast, antinomies and argument are suggested, and perceived by an audience, in forms specific to the cinema.

When Leopold Jessner staged *Die Büchse der Pandora* in 1911, he had written:

*Lulu is honest, because she is woman, only woman, who however, has succumbed to the pleasure of the senses, in an elementary form (Urwüchsigkeit) that cannot but bring disaster to us civilised beings, removed as we are from animal instincts.*²⁵

In 1923 he made a film called *Loulou*, with Asta Nielsen in the title role. Louise Brooks, who saw the film, describes Jessner's conception and Asta Nielsen's performance as follows:

*There was no lesbianism in it, no incest. Loulou, the man-eater devoured her sex-victims – Dr Goll, Schwarz, Schoen – and then dropped dead in an acute attack of indigestion.*²⁶

To Louise Brooks *Loulou* is pure camp, because the relationship between theatrical and cinematic body-language is so different; Jessner's conception of cinema is clearly felt to be inadequate, even though his conception of the figure ('Lulu is honest') would be completely endorsed by Louise Brooks. The cinema itself, and not least the American cinema, had drastically changed what was to be accepted as 'honest' in the visual representation of sexuality and affect. Fritz Rasp, also a favourite actor of Pabst's (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, *Love of Jeanne Ney*, *Threepenny Opera*) recognised this very well:

The first law of film acting has been for me, right from the start, to be very reticent with my gestures. When I came from theatre to the stage, I realised that acting for the living image meant a complete break with the theatre, and that the strongest visual effects are... achieved solely through the complete internalisation of a role, for which one is the right physical type. That is why I prefer working for directors who have... recognised my physical appearance... so that acting in film, although this may seem paradoxical, is for me today not 'acting' at all, but – 'being'.²⁷

Another aspect needs to be remembered, one that points to a sociological difference between theatre and cinema, in respect of audiences – that is to say, in respect of the kinds of visual pleasure, curiosity and emotion that might bind an audience to the cinema. Wedekind's plays engage an audience's curiosity on a double level: the interest in the representation and dramatisation of raw sexual desire is coupled with the gratification of a social curiosity that allows glimpses at the private pleasures and vices of the ruling classes. In Berlin of the late '20s, by contrast, as Louise Brooks remarks:

the ruling class publicly flaunted its pleasures as a symbol of wealth and power.²⁸

Not only could the film not expect to shock with revelations, the curiosity and fascination which Pabst's *Büchse der Pandora* wanted to arouse had to be of a quite different nature. Again, Louise Brooks:

*At the Eden Hotel, where I lived in Berlin, the café bar was lined with the higher-priced trollops. The economy girls walked the street outside. On the corner stood the girls in boots, advertising flagellation. Actors' agents pimped for the ladies in luxury apartments in the Bavarian Quarter. Race-track touts at the Hoppegarten arranged orgies for groups of sportsmen. The nightclub Eldorado displayed an enticing line of homosexuals dressed as women. At the Maly, there was a choice of feminine or collar-and-tie lesbians. Collective lust roared unashamed at the theatre. In the revue **Chocolate Kid-dies**,... Josephine Baker appeared naked except for a girdle of bananas....²⁹*

Louise Brooks' description of 'collective lust' not only highlights the sexually explicit, but also the sexually ambiguous aspect of Berlin high-and-low-life. In this respect, the world of entertainment is clearly also part of what defines sexuality and sexual difference for society as a whole.

But once it is no longer prescribed in biological categories (and roles do not divide strictly along the lines of gender), sexuality becomes itself more than a social product: a symbolic structure that can articulate other values, distinctions and categories. In Pabst's film, for instance, Lulu's sexual attraction is invariably portrayed in the context of sexually ambiguous attributes. Throughout the relationship with Dr Schoen, it is her androgynous body that is emphasised. With Alwa Schoen, an incest-

being has to bear, the object of serious drama.... Figures like her belong to the race of Tantalus.... I was driven by the desire to snatch from public ridicule the enormous human tragedy of exceptionally intense and quite fruitless inner struggles...', *Die Büchse der Pandora*, Foreword (my translation).

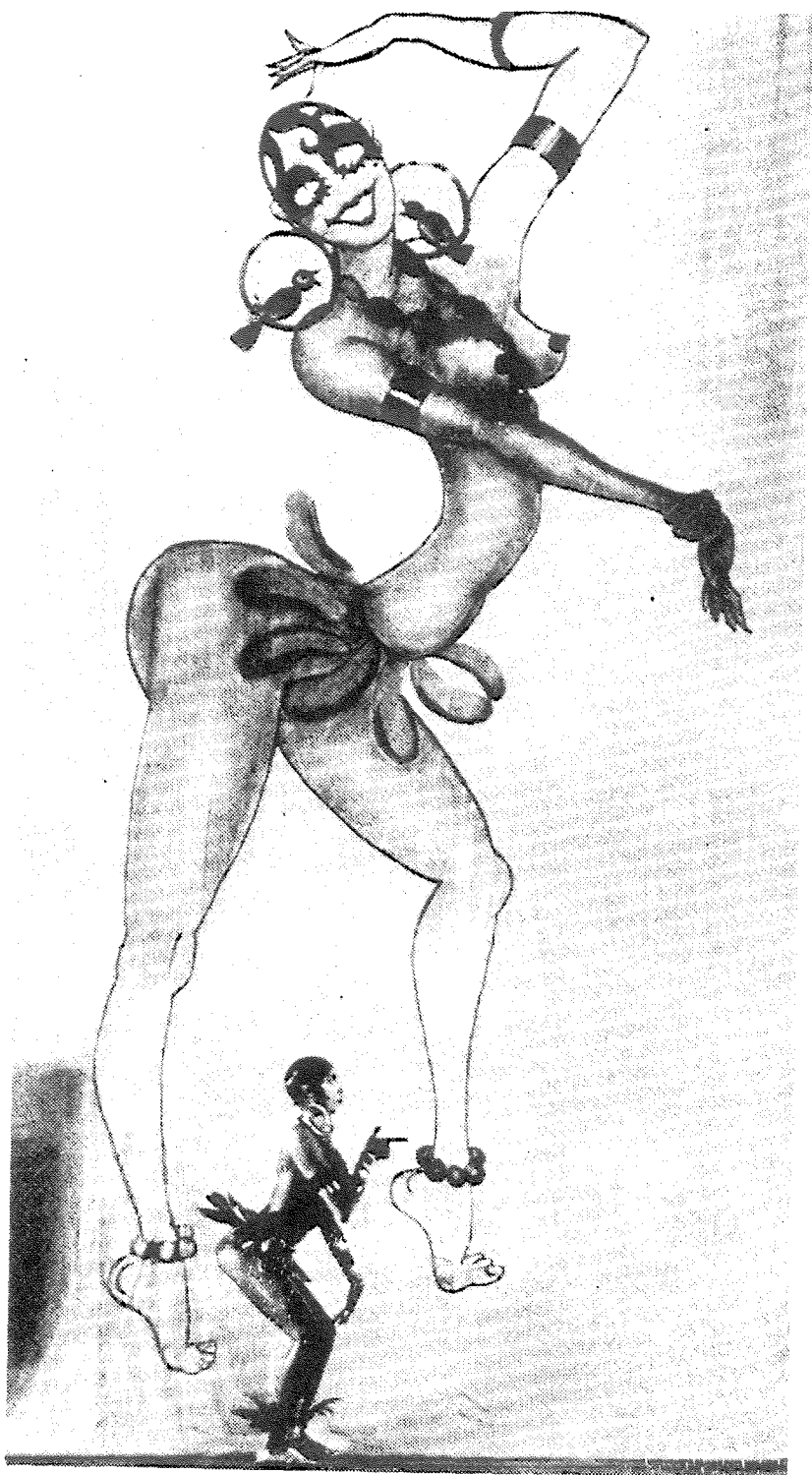
²⁵ L. Jessner, *Schriften*, Hugo Fetting (ed), Berlin (DDR), 1979, p 213.

²⁶ Louise Brooks, op cit, p 94.

²⁷ Fritz Rasp, 'Die Sparsamkeit der Geste', in *Film-Kurier*, June 1, 1929.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Louise Brooks, op cit, p 97.



Josephine Baker,
posing in front of a
poster for her
Banana Dance.

tuous and homosexual element is always present. At her wedding, Pabst makes her dance most sensuously with the lesbian Countess Geschwitz, and on the gambling boat, she lets herself be seduced by a young sailor, in order to exchange clothes with him. Following on directly from this reversibility of attributes seems to be the principal ambiguity that preoccupied critics of Lulu, both in the plays and the film – whether she is a victim or an agent, whether she has a passive or an active role in the events of which she is the centre. Wedekind himself writes:

*Lulu is not a real character, but the personification of primitive sexuality who inspires evil unaware. She plays a purely passive role.*³⁰

Yet this conception of Lulu as a catalyst of the obsessions and neuroses, of the restless searching for meaning and value among the men she encounters, is rendered ambiguous precisely because she is a 'personification'. As such she has a positive presence, because for Wedekind 'primitive sexuality' does constitute an expressive potential as well as a creativity that is close to an absolute, the presumed 'essence' of woman.³¹ Critics did not always see Lulu as 'purely passive'. An English reviewer wrote:

*Wedekind reacted against German Naturalism and his plays are as full-blown and direct as anything the Elizabethans could produce; indeed, the nearest parallel to his Lulu cycle is **The Duchess of Malfi**, except that in the former case the woman is the active principle of evil.*³²

Agency is a crucial question because in our society moral evaluation of guilt or innocence, evil or virtue attaches itself to intentionality and agency. Given the traditional division of sex and gender in terms of active and passive, Lulu's behaviour would find itself interpreted accordingly, and thus her function as a figure of projection for fantasies of power and control is also at stake.

Pabst, it seems to me, resituates all these questions, firstly by a script that drastically reduces the number of protagonists and simplifies their narrative functions, and secondly, by his choice of actress. The narrative, apart from stressing sexual ambiguity, involves the male protagonists (except Schigolch) in a perpetually brooding, scheming, angry and frustrated state, the very parody of inwardness in search of expression and self-realisation. Against this world, obsessed with intentionality, goals and motives, Lulu appears exacerbating and provocative, ie seductively sexual – because she is a being of externality, animated but without inwardness; attentive, but without memory; persistent, but without will-power or discipline; intelligent but without self-reflexiveness; intense but without pathos. Her superiority resides in the fact that these effects-without-causes are experienced by the men as both fascinating and a threat.

As to the choice of actress, the cameraman Paul Falkenberg reported:

³⁰ quoted in *ibid*, p 94.

³¹ Artur Kutscher is very good on this point: 'The inner pivot of Lulu is also determined by Wedekind's attitude to the women's question. . . . The nineteenth century and its movements of emancipation has "masculinized" Woman, and literature from . . . Hebbel . . . to Strindberg gave more and more scope and significance to her struggle. Wedekind is an opponent of this movement, he wants to turn this "culture" back to nature, and tries to emancipate, with a certain one-sided virulence, the female of the species ("das Weib") from woman ("Frau"), by stressing animal instincts. It is, however, obvious from the whole conception of the character that he passionately endorses, influenced by Nietzsche, the values of suppleness and vitality.' Kutscher, *op cit*, p 121.

³² National Film Theatre programme note, no date, no citation or source.

³³ quoted in Louise Brooks, *op cit*, p 95.

³⁴ *ibid*, p 98.

³⁵ *ibid*, p 98-99.

*Preparation for Pandora's Box was quite a saga, because Pabst couldn't find a Lulu. He wasn't satisfied with any actress at hand, and for months everybody connected with the production went around looking for a Lulu. I talked to girls on the street, on the subway, in railway stations. . . .*³³

Louise Brooks had her own conception of the role. She, too, seems inclined to see Lulu as a victim, although elsewhere she says that at the end, Lulu 'receive(s) the gift that has been her dream since childhood. Death by a sexual maniac'.³⁴ Here is why she thought the film controversial:

*(Besides) daring to show the prostitute as victim, Mr Pabst went on to the final damning immorality of making his Lulu as 'sweetly innocent' as the flowers that adorned her costumes and filled the scenes of the play. . . . How Pabst determined that I was his unaffected Lulu, with the childish simplicity of vice, was part of the mysterious alliance that seemed to exist between us. . . . When **Pandora's Box** was released in 1929, film critics objected because Lulu did not suffer after the manner of Sarah Bernhardt in **Camille**. Publicity photographs before the filming of **Pandora's Box** show Pabst watching me with scientific intensity. . . . (He) let me play Lulu naturally. . . . And that was perhaps his most brilliant directorial achievement—getting a group of actors to play unsympathetic characters, whose only motivation was sexual gratification. Fritz Kortner, as Schön, wanted to be the victim. Franz Lederer, as the incestuous son Alva Schön, wanted to be adorable. Carl Goetz wanted to get laughs playing the old pimp Schigolch. Alice Roberts, the Belgian actress who played the screen's first lesbian, the Countess Geschwitz, was prepared to go no further than repression in manish suits.*³⁵

It is quite possible to see the film in the terms that Louise Brooks suggests: Lulu is a child-like creature, and her attraction resides in the incorruptibility, the lack of guile, menace, calculation, the simple pleasures she enjoys, among which are sex, but it could be the bulging biceps of a trapeze artist, the sight of old Schigolch in the doorway, the fashion page in an illustrated journal, or mistletoe at Christmas-time. But Lulu is not one of those obsessional figures of the Victorians—a child bride or Browning's 'Last Duchess'. Her sexual ambiguity and indeterminacy has nothing to do with puberty. Just as Pabst seems concerned to redefine active and passive, so he is at pains not to take up Wedekind's paradigm of the anti-social as identifiable with animal nature or tropical vegetation (it is Dr Schoen who keeps a particularly wild and luxuriant plant in his office). She is modern, in a manner that at the time would have been labelled 'American', even without the choice of a Hollywood actress for the part and the ballyhoo this created. But the film does not make 'Americanism' an issue as did Pabst's *Joyless Street*. On the contrary, it gives us a Lulu practically without origin, or particular cultural associations. No doubt, because it allows for a much more 'symbolic' configuration: Pabst's Lulu in her relations with Schoen father and son, as well as on the gambling boat, acts as a stake for male/male power play,

and her role is circumscribed by a male double fantasy: she is the woman that father and son both want to possess; she is also the phallic mother whom they want to destroy, the father by demanding that she kill herself, the son by wishing her to act out his own parricidal desire, so that his guilt feelings become her crime. In this respect, the film takes up in elegantly condensed figurations some of the main themes and motifs of Kracauer's (male, paranoiac) German soul. But the very elegance and sophistication of Pabst's narrative and visual solutions indicates that *Pandora's Box* is not primarily about the secrets of this (German) soul: more a knowing allusion to homosexual latency, and a deconstruction of the pathos of repression/expression. A central complex of German Expressionism is inspected with serene indifference, an indifference to which Lulu gives a (provisionally) female form.

V

Pabst's particular strategy can perhaps be best demonstrated by a look at the opening scene. A man's back is turned to us. He seems to be noting something in a book. It is the meter man, reading the electricity in Lulu's apartment. We first see her, as she comes from the living room into the hall, in order to give the man a small fee and offer him a glass of liqueur. Torn between looking at the bottle and looking at Lulu's revealing dress, the man drops some coins, but before he can pick them up, the bell rings, and grandly, he volunteers to answer the door for her. Outside is a shabby old man, holding his bowler hat with self-deprecating humility. With another grand gesture, the meter man takes a few coins from his waistcoat pocket, to give to the old man and be rid of him. But Lulu, peering past his back, recognises the visitor, rushes out, and flings her arms around the old man; she pulls him into the apartment and past the meter man into the living room, shutting the door. The meter man, not hiding his surprise and disappointment, stoops to gather up the lost coins, goes over to the chair and picks up his peaked cap and battered briefcase. He gives the closed door an indignant look and exits by the front door.

The scene plays on a number of ambiguities. As I hope the description conveys, the meter man (whom the spectator only gradually perceives as such: without his official uniform cap and his back turned, he merely looks the kindly old gentleman) is caught in both a class- and a sex-fantasy, which allows him, even if only for an instant, to place himself in the position of owner of the apartment, and desirable suitor. He becomes Schoen, the master, by the very appearance of someone socially inferior to himself, whom he can patronise by giving him alms. Mirroring himself in the smile of a ravishing young woman he becomes young and handsome himself, and the fact that his attention is further divided between sexual allure and alcohol, allows him the illusory choice between two kinds of transgressions, of which the one he chooses, namely

alcohol, may well be the consolation he seeks for the unattainability of the other.

In this brief episode, remarkable for giving us virtually no plot information, the normal social relations implied by master and servant (or mistress and servant), of favours rendered and money received, of alms, fees and gratuities – in short, the conditions of exchange and value – are comically suspended. But it is not only the meter man's illusions that are shattered, when the mistress of the house and the beggarly tramp fall into each other's arms. The spectator, too, plunged *in medias res*, has no time to get her/his visual bearings, for the scene is staged and edited in a very complex succession of camera-movements, glance-glance shots and glance-object shots, whose function it is to create a very mobile point-of-view structure. It establishes hierarchies and relations between the characters, only then to undo them again. There is, for instance, a very noticeably false continuity-match – Lulu is looking off-screen right, when the logic of the glance-glance cut demands her looking off-screen left – which increases the sense of an imaginary space, not quite destroying but also not quite confirming the realistic space of the hallway and entrance lobby. The two doors, front door and apartment door, suggest a rather theatrical proscenium space, but it is the effect of editing and the dynamic of the point of view shots which establishes the illusion of a real space, while at the same time, undercutting it, making it imaginary. Juxtaposed to this imaginary space, and counteracting the spectator's disorientation (which he shares with the meter man), is the image of Lulu, framed by the door and offering the spectator, too, a radiant smile and the imaginary existence of pleasure and plenitude. The disorientation increases the fascination, the dependence on the image, yet the very excess of the smile (excessive because not registering or responding to the meter man's lowly social status, Schigolch's shabby clothes) breaks the strictly narrative function of her presence within the frame, and makes her a figure of desire in and for the spectator's imaginary.

The scene is a kind of emblem of the film itself: first, in its view of social relations, since Lulu, at the end, when back in the world of Schigolch and past all sense of bourgeois decorum, flings herself into the arms of another outcast, Jack the Ripper, with the same unbounded smile. Secondly, it is also a scene that initiates cinematic identification, by placing the spectator in the fiction, via the meter man, whose lack of plot function turns the episode into a parable of movie watching as a paid-for pleasure. With his exit, the petit-bourgeoisie, Kracauer's *Ange-stellten*, exit from the fictional space of the film, and yet, they are the historical audience that the film addresses. They may take pleasure in seeing themselves portrayed on the screen, but – according to Kracauer – they take even more pleasure (and thus open themselves up to the play of pleasure and anxiety) in identifying with their 'betters'. The meter man waiting in the hall of Lulu's apartment, is in some sense also the office-worker waiting in line at the entrance lobby of the Gloria Palast, for the star to appear or the show to begin. The prologue points out, lightly, how fragile his class-identity is, and the play on the man's uniform and

status recalls Murnau's *Last Laugh*, of which it is in a sense a parody: the presence of Lulu makes it impossible for sexuality to be the repressed signified of the scene, as it is throughout Murnau's film. Lulu's total indifference to class and status renders the predominant anxiety of the early Weimar cinema—*déclassement* and proletarianisation—a comic rather than a tragic motif. The meter man's humiliation or disappointment derives from the total reversal and reversibility of the social and sexual positions, as Lulu demonstrates.



Lulu's smiling embrace of Jack the Ripper.

VI

The opening scene leads me to formulate a cautious hypothesis about sexuality in the film and its power of attraction: sexual desire constitutes itself for Pabst in the hesitation between two roles, between two glances. Lulu's 'essence'—or that of femininity in the realm of the sexual—is nowhere except in these moments of choice and division, in the reversibility of the order of exchange. Lulu is an object of desire in the imaginary of men and women, old and young; but her symbolic position is never fixed, it criss-crosses both class and gender, both the Law and moral authority.

In fact, Lulu is desirable whenever her appearance is caught in the crossfire of someone else desiring her as well, and her sexual attractiveness constructs itself always in relation to someone experiencing a crisis in their own sexual identity. An example is the encounter between Dr Schoen and his son Alwa, when the father, after having decided to give

up Lulu as his mistress, realises that his son is sexually interested in her: suddenly his passion is once more inflamed by anger, hatred and jealousy. But the son, too, experiences desire via someone else. He falls in love with her only after having seen the jealous and passionate glances that Countess Geschwitz casts at Lulu in his studio.

Such a triadic structuration strongly suggests a psychoanalytic reading along the lines sketched above: Lulu's murder by Jack the Ripper merely completes the homosexual fantasy that is centred on Alwa. After the father has died in the son's arms, killed by the mother, on whom the son has projected the guilt for his incestuous desire, Alwa appears to have freed himself from his obsession. But Lulu's escape, thanks to Countess Geschwitz, and the appearance of Casti-Piani on the train, trap Alwa once more in a masochistic, self-punishing role, powerless against the father-figures, and displacing his masochism onto Lulu, with whom he identifies. In the London scenes, the regressive – oral and anal – aspects are heavily underscored: the three live in filth, and their abode is penetrated by wind, rain, fog and cold; the skylight window, pictured as a black hole, is constantly torn open. All three of them are exclusively pre-occupied with oral gratification, Alwa greedily devouring the piece of bread that Lulu breaks off for him in disgust, and Schigolch sucking his brandy bottle like a baby. He finally settles down to Guinness and a big Christmas pudding – a return to the beginning, where both he and the meter man preferred oral pleasures to sex. Alwa's infantilism – he is in turn enraged and petulant – represents the sado-masochistic stalemate of his unresolved Oedipal dilemma. Emerging from the fog is Jack the Ripper who is also Alwa's double: for in the encounter between him and Lulu the two sides of Alwa's personality are fully played out – the tender, yielding and seductive side, and the punishing, castrating, destructive side. It is a scene filmed without violence and struggle, hence disturbingly archaic, where the very tenderness indicates a fantasmatic and also regressive quality. As the Ripper leaves and meets Alwa at the front door, a sign of recognition seems to pass between the men that sets Alwa free and allows him, too, to disappear into the fog, having found his sexual salvation from ambivalence.

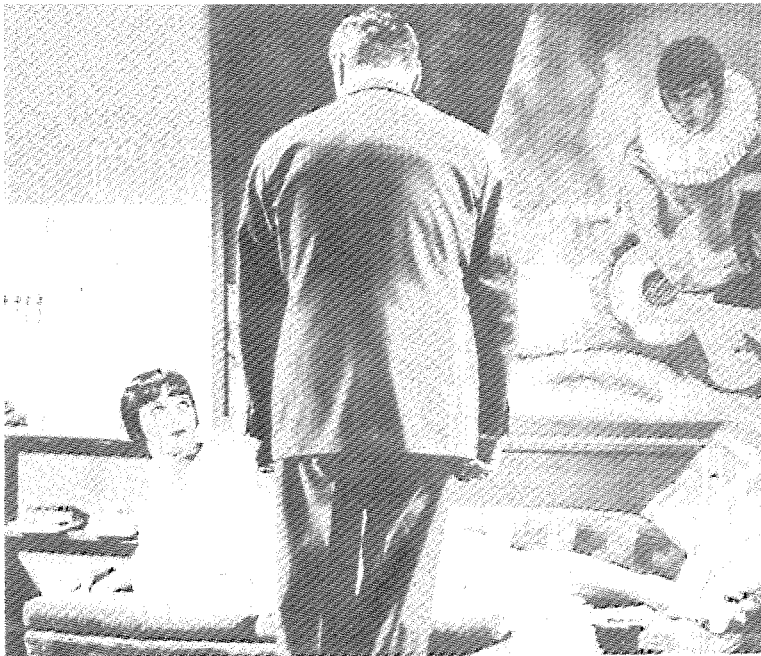
The film is centred on Alwa in such a reading – problematic in terms of plot, but suggestive of a possible male spectator position. Conversely, a feminist reading might argue that Lulu, after challenging Oedipal and patriarchal logic by placing herself outside it, had succumbed to it the very instant she herself manifests sexual desire, as she clearly does for the Ripper. In this sense, her death inscribes itself in a hysterical reassertion of patriarchy: the woman is sacrificed, so that the order of men can continue, cemented by a perpetually displaced homosexuality and a desexualisation of women as represented by the female Salvation Army that accompanies the entire episode.³⁶ Yet it seems doubtful whether this reading is wholly satisfactory either: however poignant the tenderness, it is without pathos or the element of horror one might associate with such a scene. The tenderness stays, but a cool irony ensures that the end is anticlimactic, a dream that is already faint, and fading, as it occurs, into the

³⁶ This reading owes a great deal to a discussion with Mary Ann Doane and a seminar paper she gave at the University of Iowa, in Spring 1979, on *Pandora's Box*.

darkness that envelops all.

I would prefer to see in the ending another way that Pabst distances himself from the socio-sexual imaginary that Kracauer describes, by showing the events as if he was citing them, and thus holding up for inspection a certain form of patriarchy, or more precisely, a particular vision of sexuality – at once ecstatic and apocalyptic – as it might be said to characterise Wedekind's plays and Expressionism, Kokoschka's *Murder Hope of Women*, or Brecht's *Baal*.

For the dynamism of the film, its vivaciousness – and to this extent, its fundamentally different eroticism – comes in large measure from the stark, but always modulated, and often subtly shaded contrast between Lulu's agility, the diaphanous and transparent quality of her body in motion, and the solidity, the heavy black bulk of the men, blocking her way. Lulu's body is in motion even when she stands still, because motion might carry her away at any instant, unmotivated, mercurial and unpredictable. Just as Lulu smiles, and one hesitates to say why, or at whom, and from what inner vision, so her body moves without necessarily inflecting her gestures with intentionality, whereas about the men, every move, every finger and eyebrow is heavy with significance. Of Fritz Kortner, as Dr Schoen, we mainly see his back. His acting style, and Pabst's use of him to fill the frame, stress the bull-necked, looming and cowering nature of his physiognomy. Such a body conveys to perfection (in that it translates into kinetic-gravitational force) the complex interplay of will-power and instinctual drive, of anger and repression, of frustrated, barely-controlled, finally flaring aggression and masochistic, self-tormenting, suicidal despair, which makes Dr Schoen the quintessential



Lulu bisected by the broad back of Dr Schoen.

contrast of Lulu, and one that becomes paradigmatic for all the men in the film. After Schoen's death, Alwa, Rodrigo, or Count Casti-Piani merely have to affect a scowl, a frown, to bend a shoulder or raise an arm, and one associates the body of Dr Schoen, what he stands for in terms of ruthless plenitude (despite the contradictions) against Lulu's fluidity and lightning changes of place. As the opening scene shows, Fritz Kortner's back is not even the first in the film, among the long line of backs that finally, in the London scenes, spread blackness everywhere.

Countess Geschwitz, in her sexually ambiguous role, is a good example of how what is male and what is female is defined by its physical and gestural support, the always changing contrast between two kinds of bodies, two kinds of body-languages, two ways of filling and traversing the screen. She, Alwa and Schigolch can appear as one or the other, depending on how the dynamics of the visual composition define and redefine their symbolic positions in the narrative. And while it is comparatively easy to describe the kind of masculinity that manifests itself in Dr Schoen, then transmits itself to Alwa and Rodrigo, and finally, in a less unified, more vacillating form, reappears in the Ripper, it is much more difficult to assign to Lulu – and Louise Brooks' acting – a similarly consistent (in both senses of the word) psychological essence. Dr Schoen's back and its doubles are the very image of motive, design, intentionality, the world of cause and effect, of self-realisation as self-imposition, to which correspond self-abandonment and self-pity as their negative mirrors.

Lulu, by contrast, is always in-between: between the meter man and Schigolch, between Schigolch and Dr Schoen, between Rodrigo and Schigolch, between Alwa and Countess Geschwitz, between Alwa and Dr Schoen, between Rodrigo and Alwa, between the stage-manager and Dr Schoen, between the State prosecutor and Countess Geschwitz, between Casti-Piani and Alwa, between Casti-Piani and the Egyptian. . . . If it was simply a matter of sexual desire, the sexual would indeed emerge as the elemental, irrational, a-social force that it is in Wedekind. Yet almost invariably an economic motif appears to disturb the symmetry. It accompanies the sexual link between the characters, but it also crosses it in the opposite direction. This may be a banal observation if one sees Lulu as a prostitute, who trades sex for money. In actual fact, sex and money stand in a much more complex relation to each other in the film. Certainly, she appears as a kept woman, but it is nonetheless Lulu who gives money – to the meter man and then to Schigolch. Dr Schoen finances Alwa's theatre revue, as a way to stop Lulu getting involved with his son. Schigolch introduces her to Rodrigo, because 'men like Schoen won't always pay the rent', but Rodrigo has no sexual interest in her. Countess Geschwitz supports Lulu financially, because she is in love with her, but the favour is not returned. Casti-Piani blackmails Alwa, but he is not interested in Lulu sexually. On the boat, Rodrigo tries to blackmail her, and it is only with a complicated sexual ploy that she can get rid of him. By this time, Alwa is no longer interested in her sexually, yet constantly demands money from her. The police are offering a

reward for her arrest, and the Egyptian is quoting a price for her body: Casti-Piani simply calculates which is the better deal. In the London scenes, where Lulu is most explicitly shown as a prostitute, we never see her with clients or in a financial transaction, and she gives herself to Jack the Ripper precisely because he has no money.



Lulu in-between –
Countess Geschwitz
and Dr Schoen.

Sexual desire is thus part of a more generalised structure of exchange, and in the case of the men, it seems wholly bound up, but not identical with, money and finance. Male desire, in other words, has a precise exchange value, for which either money or sex serve as accepted currency: Lulu is that which allows both desire and money to circulate. The reward offered in the name of the law, for instance, opens up an unbroken chain between police, Alwa, Casti-Piani, the Egyptian slave-trader, Rodrigo and Geschwitz: it is as if the law fixes Lulu's price, and everyone else enters into an exchange, in order to trade most favourably with the same stock.

The scenes on the gambling ship make the relations explicit: while gambling with cards goes on at the tables, Casti-Piani and the slave-trader bargain over Lulu, and a sexual gamble between Rodrigo and Countess Geschwitz is started by Schigolch: all three of them finally decide Lulu's fate, but they do so negatively. It is the sexual role-change that saves her life. What on the level of the plot appears as the suspense

logic of melodramatic complication, in effect an attempt to dramatise 'the relativity of values' in a given society. (The gaming tables, and the mad rush for the stakes, when Alwa has been caught cheating, inevitably recall the stock exchange and gambling imagery of Lang's *Dr Mabuse the Gambler*, 1922). In this instance, however, as in Wedekind's play, this is accomplished without constructing sexuality as an absolute. On the contrary, in Pabst's film a new kind of equivalence, under the sign of interminable exchangeability, is shown to exist between desire, sex and money, an endless chain, which is both the motive force behind the men's anger and frustration, and the reason why they are—despite the different Oedipal/class configurations—mere substitutes for each other.

The London episode is here doubly ironic. It takes us back to the world of the lumpenproletariat, a world outside bourgeois society where the nexus capital-productivity (of which the gaming tables are both parody and apotheosis), sex and money does not apply, and the whole libidinal economy of exchange is meaningless: Jack the Ripper and Lulu are not endowed with the kind of super-sexuality which the Lulu plays project onto the lumpenproletariat. Instead, she is at her most maternal and child-like, and he is clearly impotent. At the same time, they meet at Christmas, amidst the dispensations of the Salvation Army. In other words, Pabst takes them outside all constituted forms of exchange into limit-cases and utopian forms of exchange—those of the gift, of grace and salvation. Directed against both Wedekind's social romanticism, and against the emergent capitalist logic of exchange, as well as criticising the institutionalised otherworldliness of religion, the ending is so anticlimactic because it's built as a series of mutually undercutting ironies.

VII

If the gambling ship is in a sense the fictional metaphor for the economic chaos of the Weimar Republic, demonstrating the mechanics of inflation, de- and revaluation as it inflects and transforms sexual difference, and with it the symbolic position of women within a patriarchal society, Pabst also has in mind another emergent institution that is radically transforming society: the symbolic logic that ties together subjectivity and representation, sexuality and the image. This institution might be called the order of the spectacle, and it appears in *Pandora's Box* as the critique of theatre in the spirit of the cinema, this time not focused on acting but on *mise-en-scène*.

At the centre of the first part and as its climax, Pabst has placed a scene in the theatre—in terms of the narrative, it is the point where all the threads so far introduced are tied into the proverbial Gordian knot, which Lulu undoes at a stroke. It is the opening night of Alwa's revue. Lulu suddenly refuses to go on stage, because she has seen Dr Schoen enter, accompanied by his official fiancée, the daughter of the Prime Minister. Despite everyone's protestations and entreaties, Lulu remains

adamant. The tension mounts, the stage-manager is frantic. Eventually, Schoen agrees to see Lulu in her dressing-room. But no amount of aggression, verbal or physical appears to move Lulu to a change of mind. Dr Schoen, eyes blazing with hatred, cannot resist the seductive force of her negativity. Sexually aroused, he embraces her at just the moment when Alwa, frantic, and Schoen's fiancée, worried about his absence, enter the dressing-room. Profound consternation all round, except for the theatre-manager and Lulu, who, triumphant, sweeps past the shocked assembly and leaves the dressing-room in the direction of the stage. The scene ends with a brief exchange between father and son (symmetrical to the one where the two struck the bargain over Lulu's appearance in the revue), to the effect that Schoen will marry Lulu, even though (because?) it will be his ruin.



Lulu refuses to go on stage for the opening night of Alwa's revue.

What gives the scene its force is primarily the editing, as it cross-cuts between the effervescence and mounting chaos on- and back-stage, and the more and more single-minded determination of Lulu to provoke a show-down, once and for all. But determination is perhaps the wrong word, because it makes her seem too active, when in fact it is the strength of her refusal, her negativity, the control she keeps on her absence that makes the events take shape in her favour. Pabst here recasts and reformulates the central 'moral' issue of the play: is Lulu active or passive, evil or innocent? The answer that the film gives is that she is neither, that it is a false dichotomy. Instead, it becomes a matter of presence or absence, of spectacle, of image and *mise-en-scène*: Lulu puts on a show of her own disappearance – and reappearance. The spectacle of her person, about which she controls nothing but the cadence and discontinuity of presence, is what gives rise to desire and fascination. Lotte Eisner, trying

³⁷ Lotte Eisner, 'A Witness Speaks', quoted in Louise Brooks op cit, p. 107.

³⁸ MacPherson, 'Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney', *Close Up*, December 1927, p. 26, quoted in S. Kracauer, op cit, p. 178.

to describe the magic of Louise Brooks' acting, after a visit to the set in 1929, circles around the same phenomenon:

*And this Louise Brooks, whom I had scarcely heard speak, fascinated me constantly through a curious mixture of passivity and presence which she projected throughout the shooting. . . . (She) exists with an overwhelming insistence; she makes her way through these two films (ie **Pandora's Box** and **The Diary of a Lost Girl**) always enigmatically impassive. (Is she a great artist or only a dazzling creature whose beauty traps the viewer into attributing complexities to her of which she is unaware?)³⁷*

What Lotte Eisner does not discuss, is the role of Pabst's editing technique in achieving the effect of enigmatically impassive presence. Film history usually credits him with a particular type of montage or editing-style that makes the transitions from shot especially smooth, dynamic and imperceptible, the so-called 'cut on movement':

At the moment of one cut somebody is moving, at the beginning of the adjoining one the movement is continued. The eye is thus so occupied in following these movements that it misses the cuts.³⁸

In observing, say, on an editing table, the way that Pabst breaks down a scene into smaller and smaller units, to reassemble, intercut and build up the fragments into a complex crescendo of frantic motion, one can clearly see the above principle at work in giving the impression of speed, dynamism and simultaneity – the aesthetic juncture between futurism and classic Hollywood narrative cinema. But the more crucial effect in the theatre scene is derived from another logic altogether, that of the point-of-view shot, which is to say, the *mise-en-scène* of glances and the organisation of the look. It essentially reconstructs the action in terms of seeing and being seen, of who looks at whom, across which intercut piece of business, dramatic fragment or decor space. Lulu disappears from the stage, because, as the intertitle says, she 'will dance for the whole world, but not in front of that woman', meaning Schoen's fiancée. But it is for Schoen's fiancée and son that her tantrum in the dressing-room is staged. When they see her and Schoen in each other's arms, the show is over. Not to appear in public means to re-stage a private, Oedipal, sexual drama in a space ambiguously poised between private and public, thus exacerbating the inherently voyeuristic-exhibitionist relationship between audience and performer.

With it, the battle of the sexes, the question of possession, of who belongs to whom and who controls whom, becomes a battle for the right to the look and the image, the positionality of the subject as seeing or seen. Dr Schoen's undoing, in the film's terms, is precisely that he, supreme possessor of the right to look, emphasised by his glittering monocle and his scowling, piercing eyes, becomes himself the object of the gaze: in other words, an image, which in terms of classical narrative is to say, feminised. Such is the logic of the visible that underpins the general position of women in our society, encouraged to objectify their

narcissistic self-image as that which regulates their lives: in order to be and to assure themselves of their existence, they seek a gaze in which to mirror themselves. The star, especially the female star – itself a historical phenomenon – develops the implications of this specularity to its limits. Lulu has no gaze, hence the fascination of her smile. It is so open as to appear empty, unfocused, mirror-like. The few times she frowns or looks puzzled, Pabst neutralises her gaze by inserting a cut that disperses, disorients the direction, as in the deliberate mis-match of the opening scene. Some of the difficulties of finding the right actress, as well as Louise Brooks' detailed account of the shooting, confirm the importance that Pabst attached to the look that poses no threat. At one stage he considered Marlene Dietrich for the part, but is reported to have said:

³⁹ quoted in Louise Brooks, *op cit*, p 96.

*Dietrich was too old and too obvious – one sexy look and the picture would have become a burlesque.*³⁹

In the theatre scene, the private Oedipal family spectacle is set within the public, exhibitionist revue. One seems to be the reason for the other, a kind of exchange seems to exist between them. Superficially, the contrast takes up a division already evident in Wedekind: that between the various bourgeois family dramas where Lulu makes her destructive presence felt, and the circus ring, in which she is exhibited among the wild and beautiful animals. But if Pabst similarly places his representation in a double perspective, it is not Wedekind's of family vs circus, social vs animal. Instead, we have two kinds of theatricalisation, two kinds of public spectacle, two kinds of visualisation (which effectively put both family and spectacle outside anthropological or biological associations). One might say that the film contrasts the world on-stage with the world back-stage, and the ironies, the dramatic interest, derive from the comic clash of two related, but dissimilar realms. However, Pabst's concept seems at once more complex and more reductive: the comic divisions between back-stage and on-stage in the film are actually dismembered and reassembled by Pabst into a single, continuous, but at the same time imaginary space – and this space represents the theatre as a machinery, the interaction of separate but interdependent parts.

In the traditional theatre, the area back-stage is that which is hidden from view, the 'repressed' part of the performance, so that a representation of the disjuncture between back-stage and on-stage invariably draws its comic and dramatic effects from the disjuncture expression/repression, the hidden and the revealed. This disjuncture, as I have been trying to point out, is precisely what Pabst sees as typical of Wedekind's contradictory and patriarchal conception of sexuality and social class, a conception that the film systematically scrutinises. Against 'Loulou the man-eater' he puts Lulu, the bright-eyed American starlet, and sets a modernist-constructivist view of spectacle and visual pleasure against the classical theatre's view of stage, ramp, proscenium, curtain, and the illusion of a self-generated enactment of reality. Less than two years before Pabst made *Pandora's Box*, the Bauhaus published in its house-journal the text

⁴⁰ reproduced in
Film als Film,
catalogue
Kölnischer
Kunstverein,
1977, p 88.

and picture of what a recent exhibition catalogue lists as a 'kinetic object-box', Heinz Loew's Mechanical Stage-Model, intended as a manifesto 'about stage-mechanics in general':

*Guided by a mistaken feeling, today everyone anxiously tries to hide from view on stage any kind of technical process. Which is why for a modern audience ('den modernen Menschen') back-stage is often the most interesting spectacle, since we live in the age of technology and the machine.*⁴⁰

This seems precisely the spirit in which Pabst conceived the scenes at the revue as a deconstruction of theatre by a constructivist cinema. Unlike the theatre, which represses and displaces the split between the spectacle and that which produces it, between the fantasies that lie behind the realism of its illusion, the cinema—although in one sense the realistic medium par excellence and dedicated to the creation of illusions—is, as the phrase has it, a dream *factory*. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* situates itself in this very split between back-stage and on-stage, between repression, displacement and the concealed, by showing the mechanics of repression and concealment, the mechanisms of presence and absence, of the imaginary within realism, and fascination within perception.

In Pabst's theatre, activity is a ceaseless, but syncopated succession of instances caught in motion. Animation and commotion constantly fill the frame, which seems incapable of containing the elements that traverse it. People and objects enter and exit, from left to right, but also vertically: the stage-manager is suddenly hoisted into the flies, part of the set that is being moved about blots out the main protagonist, decorations and pieces of costume disappear off-frame as if through an imagined trap door. The very instability of the composition, and the constant changes of view-point and angle, make it impossible to conceive as real, solid, existent the space extending beyond and outside the frame, as the illusion of realism demands. At the same time, everyone in frame is both actor and spectator, participant and audience. The performers crowd around when Lulu and Dr Schoen have their argument, and from the moment Schoen and his fiancée become visible, they are performers, in their own, but also more and more public drama. The only spectators that are absent, because never shown, are the members of the first-night audience in the theatre. Why does it not appear? Because it would anchor the fictional space in a realist-illusionist dimension, would allow the cinema-spectator to decide and define his/her own specular position unambiguously, by situating the fragments and partial views within an extra-filmic continuity—that of the staged performance and its location in narrative time and space. This position of knowledge the film withholds, and by refusing to provide the sequence with its master-shot, Pabst indicates the extent to which he shared the concerns and outlook of the constructivists. The cinema here defines itself *through* the theatre *against* the theatre, and through expressionist psychodrama against its concept of repression and Oedipalisation. Faced with an aesthetic problem not unlike that of Brecht, Pabst did not choose opera or the

Japanese Noh plays for his *Verfremdungseffekt*, but American film-acting – neutral, minimal, pure surface and exteriority – the interface of sexuality and technology as it was present in Louise Brooks, not least thanks to her training as a dancer in the Ziegfeld Follies.

VIII

Lulu is forever image: framed in the doorway or by Rodrigo's biceps, dancing in front of Schigolch or in a Pierrot costume hanging from the wall. In the jealous encounter between Geschwitz and Alwa she is present as the costume sketches that the Countess has drawn, and with an emphatic finger Schoen stabs at the same sketches when he tells Alwa that one does not marry women like Lulu. In court she is on display in the witness-box – the very image that Count Casti-Piani recognises in the newspaper when her face appears from behind the compartment door on the train. Finally, the Egyptian settles on a price after he has shuffled through a pack of photos, which catch the spectator in a significant hesitation about how to read the image: as 'real' (within the fiction), when in fact it is 'merely' a photo (within the fiction).

The nature and function of the look thus appears to be subject to the same divisions and ambiguities that structure the signifying materials of the fiction: class, gender, body, motion, frame. In strictly cinematic terms, an analysis of the relation of the close-up shots head-on into the camera, and other types of point-of-view shots, or the relation of off-screen space to on-screen space, would probably confirm the systematic use of these markers of difference in order to keep the narrative in the register of hesitation and ambivalence. What interests me here, however, is something else: it is tempting to identify a typically male look, the look of patriarchy, of which Schoen's is evidently the paradigm. It is the look of and through the monocle, a withering look that hits Lulu, Schigolch, Alwa, Geschwitz. We might call it the look of the Father, the Law, and its force is never broken or subdued; after Dr Schoen's death, it is merely passed on – to the State Prosecutor's monocle, to Alwa's scowl and Rodrigo's frown. Of all the sexualised men in the film, only Jack the Ripper's eyes are as unfocused as Lulu's. The film therefore establishes sexuality through the disavowed and hidden power of this look. For the spell to be broken one would have to imagine Lulu return the look in defiance, rather than acknowledge its force by constituting herself as picture and image. One would have to imagine Lulu turning round and sticking out her tongue at Dr Schoen – the way that for instance the heroine of Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou* mocks a similarly castrating stare – in order to realise how this would change the film, break the fascination, because it would upset the delicate and invisible balance that has displaced the opposition between active and passive: 'one sexy look and the picture would have become a burlesque'. The peculiar ambivalence that surrounds the encounter between Jack and Lulu resides not least in the fact that here, both characters transgress the logic of the look specific to their

symbolic role in the fiction. This logic gone, the paradigm of fascination on which the narrative was built is broken.

Again, it would seem that only one reading is possible: the moment Lulu, representative of 'the woman', manifests desire and appropriates the look defined by the film as 'male', she suffers death at the hand of a severely psychotic male, tormented by evident castration anxieties. But the direction of what I have been trying to outline, the systematic difficulty of making units of the represented (in this case, men and women; the one who looks, the one who is being looked at) coincide with the act of representation (briefly, the editing, the point-of-view shot, the framing) suggests that it would be rash to reduce the fiction to a fable where characters act out ideological types or gender-specific positions. Could one not see the ending as a 'disenchantment', the breaking of a spell, and seek from there an answer to the question: what is desire, sexuality and fascination in the film?

The distinction I am trying to draw seems particularly important, since it is logical to ask whether there is opposed to the characters' look in the fiction, an inscribed gaze of the spectator, who after all, looks at all the characters and is free to draw his or her conclusion and assume the proper distance. Is the spectator's look identical with the act of representation? Can one juxtapose to the 'castrating look' the pleasurable look of the voyeur? In aligning these different types of look, it seems possible to see Lulu as the intermediary, the figure that allows for the commutation and exchange of different specular positions. For her response to the look of the Father is not to return the look with a suitably aggressive gesture, but to constitute herself as image and spectacle for the same or another subject's visual pleasure. An obvious because banal example is on the train, when, in response to Alwa's sullen frown, Lulu, as if by chance, attracts the interested and pleased eye of Count Casti-Piani. Similar reversals structure the entire court-room scene, where Countess Geschwitz, in order to divert attention from Lulu, makes a spectacle (an angry, rather than a pleasing one) of herself, which leads directly into the business of the staged fire-alarm and Lulu's escape.

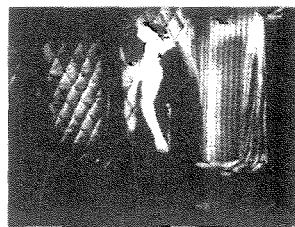
This division, however, cannot be shown to work throughout. On the contrary, Pabst's use of the point-of-view shot and his editing establish a constant transfer or slippage between the various characters' point of view and that of the camera; since for the spectator characters are stand-ins, markers of position, in the field of signification, whose function it is to split, systematically, and in constantly changing dramatic contexts, the attention of the viewer, Pabst's textual system here introduces subtle but significant variations on the 'norm' of classic realism. A brief reminder of the rôle played by the meter man in the opening scene: the spectator participates in his point of view, 'moral' as well as physical. Yet, although he is on the screen for no more than a minute or so, his gaze, his back and his preference for liqueur are all 'preserved' for the fiction, as his semantic attributes are split between Schigolch, Schoen and the mobile, hovering, alternating point of view—making hesitation and indeterminacy part of the very definition of spectatorship and its

pleasure in this film. Pabst's insistence on Lulu as image, framed picture for the characters in the fiction as well as for the spectator, renders even more ambiguous any distinction between the characters' look and that of the spectator. By far the most disturbing, because virtually unreadable scene – unreadable not in its narrative logic, but in the logic of glance-glance, facial expression, space and gesture – is the death of Dr Schoen. Schoen presses Lulu to kill herself, after he has surprised her in the conjugal bedroom with Alwa's head cradled in her lap. Pabst stages the scene in a series of medium shots, with Lulu and Schoen cut off at the waist. As Schoen tries to force the gun into Lulu's hand, both of them appear in the bedroom mirror. From then on, it is impossible for the spectator to decide whether he sees Schoen or his mirror-image, whether Schoen looks at Lulu, the camera or himself. On their faces, as they struggle, the expressions subtly and continuously change; from surprise, anger, anxiety they modulate until the emotive quality or intentionality of their looks become indecipherable. Finally, a faint column of smoke rises between their faces, Schoen looks pleased, Lulu surprised, but then Schoen's features become rigid, as his body begins to slide out of frame, and blood trickles from his mouth. Lulu's face glazes over, but also shows intent curiosity as the camera pulls back to reveal her holding the smoking gun. As she turns from the mirror, her body is broken up, by a rapid succession of close-ups, before it is virtually smothered by Schoen's slumped body. The scene ends with Alwa re-entering the room, looking fascinated and horrified at his father's dying face.

The very discrepancy between the highly dramatic, but nonetheless coherent narrative situation and the elaborate manner of its staging splits the spectator's perception and points of view in ways that subvert actantial (who does what to whom) and gender identification, in favour of a sliding, reversible, difficult identification of face and gesture. Its effect is to make the scene imaginary, which is to say, it allows us to talk about the scene as a fantasy, be it a primal scene fantasy or Alwa's own wish-fulfilling fantasy. What is important is that such a reading is not a metaphoric interpretation of a diegetically realistic scene. It is a specifically filmic elaboration of the signifying elements which renders the scene imaginary.

One might, however, just as convincingly, construct the scene as 'narrated' from Dr Schoen's point of view. In which case, it could represent his struggle, and ultimate failure, to 'possess' Lulu, to fix, limit and define her – if necessary by the act of marriage – in order to impose on her the negative identity of his obsessions. Schoen at the wedding is depicted as a man whose life is suddenly and dramatically getting out of control, and in the end only a pistol shot can put an end to the chaos. Since the wedding is in some important aspects a repetition of the chaos at the theatre, the notion suggests itself that the way he put a stop to the first one, namely by the proposal of marriage to Lulu, and the second one, the proposal that Lulu commit suicide, are structurally identical: a caustic comment on the bourgeois institution of marriage.

The problem with this reading, however, is that in the light of my earlier observations, it is impossible to ignore that the filmic narration in



Above, shots from the death of Dr Schoen.

the scene is considerably more complex, making it unlikely that the narrative point of view is that of Dr Schoen. What the systematic ambiguity of the point-of-view structure does allow one to do is to speculate on the conditions of cinematic perception and fascination. In the staging of Dr Schoen's death, the act of viewing itself becomes an activity of the imaginary: presented as a series of views of 'real' or identifiable objects or part-objects (hands, faces, backs, etc), their sequence is, however, organised in such a way that they constantly imply what we do not see, or evoke a space where we are not. The cinema here is never what is shown: it is always also what the shown implies or demands in the way of the not-shown and not-seen. The many different systems that Pabst develops in this film for splitting perception, in order to create hesitation, indeterminacy or ambiguity are ultimately in the service of producing out of real perceptions imaginary sights. Pabst, one is tempted to say, wanted a *mise-en-scène* that would make Lulu a phantom, and the hyperreal magic of her sexual presence is the indeterminacy, at all these levels, of her sexual identity. Being an object of desire for everyone in the film, she preserves herself by being nothing and everything, a perpetual oscillation in the dramaturgy of conflict and aggression. The fact that Schoen cannot possess her and dies in the attempt to do so, gives an indication of Pabst's concept of the Lulu figure: to create a presence without an essence, a presence that is heightened to the point of hallucinatory clarity solely by the play of difference and ambiguity. He transforms the cinema into an institution that turns the desire for possession into an obsession with the image, and the obsession with the image into a mirror-maze of divided discontinuous, partial views, whose identification and interpretation always entail a fine and final doubt – for me indicated by the different readings of the symbolic structure I have given, none of which 'settles' the issue.

IX

I said earlier that the meter man never returns. I would now like to revise this statement. We see him first studying a book. He turns round and sees Lulu, *as* the spectator sees her and *when* he sees her. The meter man is thus the first spectator, turning from writing/reading to looking. In a different guise, he returns as the last spectator. After Jack the Ripper kills Lulu, he steps out of a doorway, glances at Alwa, tightens his raincoat and walks off into the night fog. After a brief hesitation, Alwa, too, begins to walk off, disappearing into the night. They look like men leaving the cinema – not the Gloria Palast, but the sort of cinema that caters for men in raincoats. Both look disappointed, disenchanted, as if the spectacle had finally revealed its emptiness, its nothingness, had proven to be 'a masquerade that shows that there is nothing there'. Jack the Ripper, as long as he looks into Lulu's eyes, is held by her image, the smile that fascinates with its radiant openness and indeterminacy. It is only when, in the embrace, he looks *past* Lulu, that the knife appears –

the object of his own obsessions, like the 'knife phobia' of the protagonist in Pabst's *Geheimnisse einer Seele/Secrets of a Soul*, 1926. Past the image, past the smile, he encounters once more only himself, only his own anxieties. Jack the Ripper, as a stand-in for the spectator, wanting to grasp the presence that is Lulu, finds that he is distracted/attracted by the flickering candle and the glittering object: oscillating between the source of light and its reflection, his gaze traverses the woman, making her an image, a phantom, a fading sight.

This, once again, suggests a psychoanalytic reading. It suggests that, yes, indeed, the pleasures of spectatorship are of a voyeuristic nature, and that they enact a fetish fixation. And yet, what analysis shows is that the point-of-view structure and the manifold divisions of the film's textual system depend only in some respects on the ambiguities focused on the representation of the woman's body. Sexuality in the cinema, as it emerges from Pabst's film, is not a matter of censorship and innuendo, of frank portrayal and realistic scenes, or any of the other terms one usually finds in public debates about 'pornography' – nor is it a question of degrading acts committed on women: all these positions, moral and ideological, Pabst seems to have anticipated and significantly restated. Sexuality in the cinema, in *Pandora's Box* at any rate, is the infinitely deferred moment of, the constantly renewed movement away from, identity – and the film sustains this movement by the creation of a specifically cinematic imaginary that has no equivalence in either literature or the theatre. Pabst called his film not *Earth-Spirit*, but *Pandora's Box*: Pandora's Box is the cinema-machine, the machinery of film. *Mise-en-scène*. The achievement of Pabst's film, in other words, is to have presented sexuality *in* the cinema as the sexuality *of* the cinema, and to have merely used as his starting point the crisis in the self-understanding of male and female sexuality that characterised his own period. Yet Pabst is far from implying an ontology of cinema, or to posit an essence of film, any more than he believes in an essence of sexual identity. The very play on 'Büchse'/'Box', on the level of the signifier – can of film, camera, Freudian 'symbol' of the female sex – disperses any notion of the fixity of the signified, be it sex or the cinema.

This is why, in some respects, the Louise Brooks of *Pandora's Box*, can be compared with the Maria of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* – the man-created robot-woman. Significantly enough, the figure of Lulu cannot be conceived as a mother, her eroticism is constructed on the paradigmatic opposition to all the traditionally female roles, and yet, while the same is true of the femme fatale, with the latter, it is a sociological and biological paradigm to which she is contrasted, rather than the technological-constructivism that seems to me to underlie Pabst's conception of Lulu. In Pabst's other film with Louise Brooks, *Diary of a Lost Girl*, the heroine does have a child – illegitimate, and taken away from her – and this fact fundamentally changes the character, making the film more of a melodrama and pathos-laden, the woman becoming the victim and the film a sociological *pièce à thèse*. With the introduction of the biological function of women, we immediately have sociology and morality,

whereas in *Lulu*, it is precisely the absence of these motifs that makes the erotic shine so brilliantly but also so coldly. Indeed, *Lulu*'s hint of a maternal function for Jack the Ripper is precisely that which makes her fallible and vulnerable. The film thus becomes a parable of the new woman, created by man, whose fatal weakness is her maternal 'memories'.

The eroticism of *Lulu* is paradoxically that of the creature that comes to life, the auto-eroticism of the creator and the narcissism of the creature – a relationship only too familiar from the Sternberg-Dietrich myth, which Pabst very nearly anticipated with Louise Brooks three years earlier. This eroticism is one that plays, however, on a concomitant anxiety – that of the creature which emancipates itself from the creator, the sorcerer's apprentice – a motif which, with some justice, might be called the key motif of the German cinema since *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* itself, in a tradition where the robot of *Metropolis* constitutes the decisive transformation, from 'medium' or Golem to vamp and woman. It is this genealogy that might give one a clue to the mysteriously truncated subsequent career of Louise Brooks. In her essay on Pabst, she reports that, at the end of her work with him, he took her aside:

*'Your life is exactly like Lulu's' he said, 'and you will end the same way.' At that time, knowing so little of what he meant by 'Lulu', I just sat sullenly glaring at him, trying not to listen. Fifteen years later, in Hollywood, with all his predictions closing in on me, I heard his words again – hissing back to me.*⁴¹

What Pabst meant by 'Lulu' is perhaps precisely this: a woman, an American actress, created by the film industry into a star, becomes an object among objects, alive only in front of the camera. Louise Brooks' struggle with the film industry, as documented in her autobiographical essays, bore out exactly what it meant for an intelligent articulate woman to be a thing among things. It is as if, at the very threshold of becoming a star, Louise Brooks made a film which had as its subject the psychopathology of this very star system, against the background – not of Hollywood, or an ideological critique, but in terms of a very specifically German argument about expressionism, theatre, modernism and cinema. In this respect, the film is indeed the 'tissue of arguments' it was disparagingly called by Kracauer, testifying to the degree of 'abstraction' that the German cinema, in its commercial output, was capable of. The enigma of Louise Brooks is thus in part the enigma of Hollywood film-making, and the very film that might have made her a star allowed her to see what being a star entailed, in the mirror of a film that dramatised and contrasted the liberating pure externality of the 'American' character – the hope of Modernism for most of the '20s – with the contorted inwardness of the German psyche. Against its obsessiveness, but also its moral essentialism, her externality is seen to be not objectivity, and certainly not New Objectivity, but the object-status and objectification of a subjectivity and sexuality – that of women – that still had no name and no place. It was as if in the debate between patriarchy on the one side, and

technological modernism on the other, Louise Brooks had glimpsed, albeit at first unconsciously in her defeats with Hollywood but later with full lucidity, the blank that both left for women as a site of representation and being.

X

Pandora's Box, then, is constructed in terms of indecision, hesitation, reversibility, ambivalence and ambiguity. All of these are characteristics of the imaginary, of the unconscious, and in the cinema they define fascination, pleasure and the desire awakened by the image. Out of the homogeneity of photographically reproduced reality, the cinematic process creates its own specific ambiguities, upon which it constructs systems of difference and differentiation that make up the cinema's particular mode of signification, its semiotic status.

The central thematic and fictional support of ambivalence in Pabst's film is sexual desire. Male obsessions – repressed homosexuality, sado-masochism, an urge to possess, capture, limit and fix – confront feminine androgyny and feminine identity in a play of presence and absence, masks and appearances, in a display of spectacle and image as the expression of a freedom from all teleology and essentialism. But, conversely, this androgyny, this ambiguity on the level of sexual definition and identity is only the support, the metaphoric matrix, if you like, that points in the direction of a whole series of other, abstract and conceptual registers of ambiguity – in this case, those that have to do with cultural and ideological stereotypes of active and passive, subject and object, but also with the cogency of Oedipal narratives and the symbolic roles they assign to male and female subjects, on the basis of which the spectators construct their individual subject-positions, structures of identification and visual pleasure.

The source of all these ambiguities, and that which articulates them as differentiation, structure and semiotic system, is the cinema itself, with its infinite capacity of divisions – based as it is on the total divisibility of its materials (the visible world) and the intermittence of its *physical* material, the individual frames of the celluloid strip, and its *optical* material, the beam of light. Lulu, the 'free woman', living without memory or regret, without guilt or volition, is a pure invention of the cinema. That she seems so modern and so real, is a sign of how much modern reality and the cinema have become interchangeable.

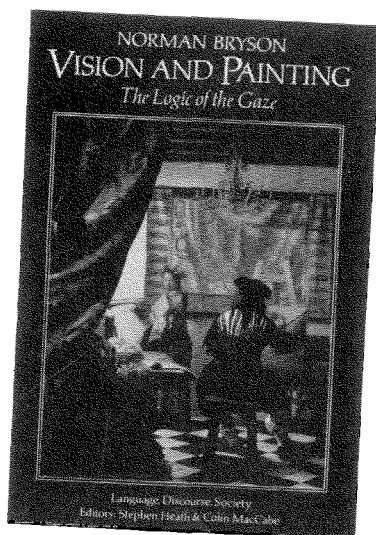
Pabst perceived this perhaps more clearly than most of his contemporaries. His emphasis on the cinema creating its own time – that of the motion of the camera whose signifiers the characters become and to which they lend their gestures, faces and expressivity – and its own space – that of editing and lighting, of the cut on movement or the cut according to the dynamics of the gaze (glance-glance, glance-object) – makes Louise Brooks embody the principle of the cinema itself, in its distinctiveness from literature, the theatre and the other arts. But in this very

principle lies an objectification of human beings and a humanisation of technology such as the cinema has developed for itself and – through its institutions – has rendered autonomous, which makes Langlois' praise of Louise Brooks that I quoted at the beginning – 'she is the intelligence of the cinematic process' – so apt and so ambiguous. For this intelligence is the principle of divisibility and division itself, of exchange and substitution, as it can be observed in the symbolic logic of Western culture and society. By contrast, it is a sign of Louise Brooks' intelligence that she decided not to become the objectified commodity which the logic of this process demanded of her. What Pabst could not prevent, in any case, was the momentous shift, whereby the film industry, seizing on the woman's body, and focusing gratification so much on the voyeuristic look, turned the cinema into an obsessional, fetishistic instrument, and thus betrayed in some sense its Modernist promise, by making this modernism instrumental and subservient to the logic of capital and the commodity.

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CAPITAL AND REALISM IN THE ITALIAN CINEMA

AN EXAMINATION OF FILM IN THE
FASCIST PERIOD
BY SAM ROHDIE

I repeat, and there is no hesitation on my part in declaring it openly, that the State wants to help the industry in its specific work, that of resistance to the foreign industry which brings to our market films of variety, of drama, of fantasy, of imagination and that strongly attract our public. It is not my fault if the public rushes to see these films. I rarely go to the cinema, but I am very aware that the public is invariably bored when the cinema seeks to educate them. The public wants to be amused, and it is precisely on this level that we want to help the Italian industry. I hope that tomorrow I am not held up to ridicule as the anti-educator of the Italian people.

Giuseppe Bottai, Minister for Culture (1930)¹

¹ G Bottai, 'Disposizioni a favore della produzione cinematografica nazionale', *Lo Spettacolo Italiano*, vol 3 no 1, January 1931.

THE ITALIAN FILM INDUSTRY during the fascist period, either in its early phase of middleman-importer-distributor of American films or in its later phase of producer of Italian ones, was an industry like Pirelli, or Montecatini, or Snia Viscosa, organised for commerce and profit. The industry, and the class which owned it, called upon the fascist State to promote business. The fascist State carried out such duties as it did for capitalism generally, of which it was the instrument. If the industry can be said to have moved in a 'fascist' course that is true insofar as fascism acted to ensure profits and power to Italian capital, but it is not true if fascism is thought in more specific and ideological terms. Quite simply the fascist State supported the direction of the industry for films of entertainment and diversion and was unfavourable to attempts by some to force the industry in a more political or propagandist direction. What was good for capital was deemed good for fascism. That the State permitted, indeed supported, the direction of entertainment and diversion was of course a political decision, a certain politics of class – but not reducible to formulas that films during fascism served the political purposes of political evasion, helped people to forget, displaced their discontent and thereby aided fascism in power. I think the truth is more mundane. The predominant power of large capital in the social bloc of fascism was the only *realistic* possibility for fascism in the economic and social situation in Italy, not, as some have claimed, a contradiction

² A Asor Rosa, *Storia d'Italia*, vol 4 part 2, Einaudi, Torino, 1975, p 1385.

³ See Thomas H Guback, 'Hollywood's International Market', in T Balio (ed), *The American Film Industry*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1976.

within fascism. The interests of capital were argued convincingly as in the interests of all; capitalism and an anti-bourgeois national populism were posed not as contradictory but as complementary and fascist support for capital not support for a particular class but support for the entire nation.² The State gave money to the film industry but left it free to pursue its profits by means of a cinema which capital deemed to be beneficial. The space of entertainment/diversion was not so much allowed by fascism as demanded by capital and needs to be conceived less as an instrument for political evasion than as the maintenance of a certain practice of culture for the sake of capitalist gain.

Realism in this framework had a curious place. The association between realism and anti-fascism is by now familiar; but realism during the fascist period best expressed fascist nationalist and populist ideals; the entertainment film industry best represented fascist practices. Realism functioned early in the fascist period as a critique of the marriage of fascism and capital in the film industry, and of a cinema seemingly devoted to bourgeois stories without social commitment, artistic worth, or fascist conscience. Realism, as it was articulated, was not simply an aesthetic position, but a political one and a class and economic one which resisted the unity of fascism and Italian capitalism in the name of a fascism differently conceived. The arguments about realism and the film industry were equally arguments about fascism, the function of the State, the role of capital and the ends of fascist culture.

I want to discuss some of these issues for the brief period 1926-1930 when Italian film production was resumed after a near decade of first decline, then collapse, when the State actively intervened in the industry, when national capital began to resist competition from American capital, and when a theory of realism was first articulated. I have placed this discussion within the framework of 'Independent Cinema' not because the films of the period were in any way radical or even nationalist-populist, but because a capitalist struggle redirected the Italian industry to take an independent position against American economic power to which it had been subject albeit with films that resembled the films of America rather more than they differed from them. An independent cinema was a matter of national economic power in the film industry (the power of Italian capital) declared in the name of Italian fascism, not a matter of a style of cinema.

II

As early as 1913, but markedly by 1919, the American film industry, for reasons to do with the world economy generally and the dominant global position of American capital, sought control of world film markets either by successfully underselling national film industries or by directly taking over these industries, or both.³ There were exceptions like Germany with sufficient capital strength to resist or the Soviet Union which opposed the Americans for political reasons, but Italy was not among

these. By 1925 American films had completely displaced Italian films in Italy. A giant trust, L'Unione Cinematografica Italiana (UCI), a consortium of film producers, was formed in 1919 (Ambrosio Film, Cines, Caesar Film, Tiber Film) with a substantial capital of 75 million Lire provided by a group of major Italian banks (Banca Commerciale Italiana, Banca Italiana di Sconto, Credito Industriale delle Venezie) to resist competition from cheap foreign films; in 1921 it closed its Rome and Turin studios; by 1923 it had completely ceased production.⁴ A memorial of the period recalled:

*The Americans began their market incursions modestly, without fanfare, unloading in Italy a great quantity of well-made, easily enjoyed films for which they negotiated exclusive agencies to all of Italy at prices from one thousand to thirty thousand dollars. Naturally, exhibitors and distributors convinced that it was an exceptional bargain (and it was) rushed to make contacts and sign deals. The terms were excellent, the films very good. Their novelty, the attractiveness of the subjects, the skill of their direction, the new and interesting faces of the actors very quickly created in Italy a wave of sympathy and fascination for American films.*⁵

As UCI declined in the face of American competition, another firm, the Società Anonima Stefano Pittaluga (SASP), also with banking support (80 per cent of its share capital was owned by the Banca Commerciale Italiana), grew and profited basing itself not on Italian production but on the importing, distribution and exhibition of American films. By 1925 SASP controlled more than half the film theatres in Italy and had exclusive import and distribution rights to the films of the major and minor American film studios. On the basis of American imports then, indeed utterly dependent upon them, national Italian capital found its strength and established for itself a virtual market monopoly. SASP not only hardly produced films but their distribution/exhibition control prevented others from doing so; it was more profitable to import American films than to produce Italian ones. Declared Stefano Pittaluga, the director of SASP: 'Whoever wants to make films is either a hero, a philanthropist, or a cretin. I am not about to lose millions in order not to be attacked as antifascist, anti-patriotic, or worse.'⁶ But in 1926, this position changed: the Americans, partly because of competition from German films in Europe, decided to control their own distribution in Italy and to move into exhibition; it was a direct threat to the survival of SASP.

The history of the Italian film industry from 1926 could be written as a history of the resistance by national capital to American domination and of the formation of Italian film production. By 1943, the last year of fascist power, Italian production of 120 films finally equalled total foreign imports; the position of American films dropped from over 90 per cent of the market in the 1920s to less than 30 per cent (after 1945 with the Allied victory, America reasserted its predominance in Italy; in 1946 it exported about 900 films to Italy). But that resistance was played over nearly two decades; the very rapid consolidation of American economic power in Italy after World War I and its crucial structural

⁴ Roberto Chiti and Mario Quarnnolo, 'La malinconica storia dell'UCI', *Bianco e Nero*, anno XVIII, no 7, July, 1957, p 21.

⁵ *ibid*, p 23... a 1941 memorial of Federico Curioni.

⁶ Requested in Alessandro Blasetti, 'Radioscopia', *Il Cinematografo*, August 21, 1927.

importance within the Italian industry could only slowly be dismantled; Italian capital required on the one hand to build a production industry and maintain its distribution-exhibition monopoly, and, on the other, to continue to screen American films on which that monopoly and its profits depended. The Italians had both to depend upon the Americans and to compete with them. As late as 1938, when the fascist State wholly took over control of film distribution and promised strict controls over imports of American films causing the withdrawal of the major American companies, Italian distributors and exhibitors, who feared ruin by the American withdrawal, vigorously protested. (The State acted to protect currency and gold reserves on a shrinking balance of payments account, i.e. it acted for general economic reasons more crucial than any specific interests in the film industry.) Similar distress was expressed in 1929 when American sound films, at first unsuitable in Italy for reasons of language, seemed to threaten the Italian industry with collapse: film attendances for part of that year dropped as much as one-third. On the one hand, national capital in the film industry needed to strengthen itself against American competition; on the other hand it required American films and needed to conform to American pressures in order for it to gather the strength and independence it sought.

The contradictory position of the film industry in relation to America was a general feature of the Italian economy. In the 1920s Italian capital, and the State, depended on American capital whose importance for Italy was perhaps the most prominent economic fact of the period: the reorganisation of Italian banking and currency in the early 1920s was taken under pressure from American banking and with the express purpose of stabilising the Italian financial structure in order to secure American investments; in 1929 those investments were nearly at 8,000 million dollars and helped strengthen monopoly tendencies in Italian heavy industry and banking and lend support to the State itself which borrowed heavily from New York banks. It would only be a slight exaggeration to assert that the Morgan Guaranty Trust, the Harriman banks and the United States Federal Reserve Bank not only bankrolled Italian fascism and directly supported Italian capital but were instrumental in determining the social policies of fascism in the 1920s, geared as they were to deflationary measures (high unemployment, wage fixing, high interest, credit restrictions) to ease Italian borrowings in the United States for which the Italian working class (always in the name of national goals) severely and massively paid.⁷

National economic independence in Italy, whether thought within the nationalist-populist ideals of fascism or in terms of its more narrow class practices on behalf of capitalism, opened a space of debate and conflict during the fascist period which was never fully resolved, no more than the economic problems themselves. In the specific instance of the film industry ideas of film realism moved within this contradictory social and political space defining a national film production and a national industry not only as one directly opposed to foreign industries, principally the American industry (a position as I mentioned not open to the

⁷ *Storia d'Italia*, vol 10 part 2, Einaudi, Torino, 1975, p 268 ff.

SASP film monopoly which though in competition after 1926 with the Americans continued to depend upon them), but also opposed to Italian monopoly control in the industry (in fact to SASP), the one opposition on the basis of a nationalist critique (to the point where the coming of sound was welcomed in that it excluded American films and was believed to enable Italians to make silent films unopposed), the other on the basis of a populist critique, i.e. the need for a national popular direction to the film culture, rather than a class-capitalist one.

III

Between 1926-1930 (I have closed with 1930 because that year initiates a new phase of film production for the Italian industry as well as introducing the new factors of sound and the world economic depression) SASP engaged in a number of strategies to strengthen its position in the market against American competition, but at the same time retain its middleman role with American companies: it sought to improve its distribution-exhibition monopoly and to control all potential sources for film production; it sought to initiate film production by gaining a protected space for that production and by finding ways to attract capital in a market seemingly ever disadvantaged for Italian producers by its restrictedness, its lack of export outlets combined with the relative high costs of production. In 1926, bidding against Paramount Studios, SASP purchased the failed UCI production company for a modest 45 million Lire, in part for its production facilities, primarily for its theatrical exhibition circuit. The SASP explanation (rather defense) for the purchase was directed towards criticism of its further monopolisation of the film market from would-be small producers and smaller distributors/exhibitors; SASP argued that monopoly capital structures were the only ones able to withstand American competition and therefore the only realistic course in the national interest. At the same time, SASP sought to defend and secure the American connection precisely through the economic strength of monopoly control over exhibition. The statement by Pittaluga, though lengthy, is fascinating:

More than anything else this 'concentration'... will reduce costs which have become too high: it is obvious that a single company will not only have greater flexibility and unity of action in industrial struggle, but will be able to eliminate all that duplication of functions, personnel, etc, that are so heavy a burden and so slight an advantage. But there is one reason of major importance. Our commercial position is particularly difficult and delicate in relation to the enormous power of the foreign film industry. It is clear that we cannot simply reject this vast production so well accepted by our public; on the other hand it has established agencies for direct distribution of its films. With this system not only is our position as middlemen destroyed, but these firms send outside our borders profits gained within them. If we are not, realistically, in a position to make our-

⁸ Fortunio, 'Il ritorno alla produzione', (intervista col comm Pittaluga), *Il Tevere*, October 23, 1926.

selves independent of that production, we must at least gain for our producers some reciprocity: negotiate... commercial treaties which will guarantee a market for Italian production. It would be foolish to try to attain this with forces which are not 'concentrated': against the foreign corporations... it is necessary to counterpose our own, an organisation with sufficient power to pressure foreign corporations into equal exchanges. The task of Pittaluga will thus be, first: to persuade those companies with agencies in Italy to abolish them and to transfer them to Pittaluga; second: to stabilise by agreement that a certain number of Italian films, in proportion to the films we acquire from abroad, be shown outside Italy... The film industry can survive and prosper only when its business horizons become 'international': the cost of production is not even approximately covered by the home market, especially in Italy, a small and not wealthy country.⁸

With regard to a guaranteed space for production, which would in its guarantee help to secure banking capital, SASP asked for a 10 per cent screening quota for Italian films, but opposed would-be producer pressure for direct import controls against foreign, largely American films. SASP wanted a modest initial place for an Italian production but the continuance of American imports which, in part through its theatrical control, it might still distribute. SASP also favoured, and secured, the formation of a State company (equally opposed by producer groups), the Ente Nazionale di Cinematografia, to mediate distribution with the Americans (awarded to SASP) and to negotiate joint marketing and production deals with other than American foreign companies, largely German. Finally, SASP pressured the State to a policy of direct economic support and subsidy for production (direct State intervention in the economy did not become general in Italy until after 1933 when the full effects of the depression began to be experienced and then such intervention was along lines of other capitalist States... it was both crucial during the fascist period but not attributable to fascism itself) to strengthen SASP in relation to American production (cheapening costs) and lessen speculative risks for Italian banking investment. (The legislation for such support provided for State subsidies of 10 per cent of gross box office receipts; the support was to run over a five year period with funds of 2½ million Lire, in fact the bill was extended and the amount of capital substantially increased).

It was SASP that pressured the State. And the measures the State took, either for restrictions or quotas or of subsidies and marketing support, (though in the name of the national interest), in effect could only benefit the SASP monopoly, the single company in a position to handle large scale distribution, to deal with the Germans, and above all, to benefit from production subsidies and screening quotas since only SASP had the studio facilities and sufficient capital to finance films in anticipation of a post-production post-marketing grant by the State.

The State in its turn was quite clear that support could only be to those sectors of the industry that had the efficiency and organisation necessary to exploit State funds and attract private ones. The State subsidy bill was thus presented:

*The proposed bill will give to industry a subsidy which will assure it more easily necessary credit finance. The principal behind the bill is that a healthy economic situation can only apply when there is a move, as in the present bill, for a more efficient and concentrated productivity of a free national industry.*⁹

⁹ G Bottai op cit.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *ibid.*

This move of direct State intervention and support of industry was, in the economic thinking of the late 1920s, an extraordinary one and just as SASP had to defend its monopolisation of the market, so too did the State need to defend its support for such monopoly, and even more, the departure from economic policies that such support involved. Argued the Minister for Culture:

*This is one of those measures that commonly go under the name of State intervention in aid of private initiative. I agree with those who deprecate the frequency and extent of such intervention. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are many sectors of national production where private initiative either does not initially exist or if it does is so weak that without the crutch of State support would never even succeed in taking its first steps . . . This is one of those cases.*¹⁰

Bottai went on not only to detail the capital weakness of the film industry ('the by now permanent inability of the national market to cover costs of production, an inadequacy that discourages private capital from investing because it cannot secure a profitable return'), but the extraordinary power of the American film industry ('... its impressive artistic, technical and economic means and its systematic and powerful control of the global market that has had no equal in the history of the cinema . . .').¹¹

In other words, State support for monopoly capital and the pursuit of profits by monopoly capital in the film industry were positions that needed defending, that were not secure, and which could only be defended in terms of national economic necessity. Criticism of such policies (realism was one such position) did not come from outside fascism but from within it and from the refusal to accept the economic necessities which capital argued. The space for that criticism was a space that fascism itself opened up; it was not fought for by a social radicalism outside fascist ideology but by a social radicalism within fascist ideology so that arguments of economic necessity were arguments by fascism to itself of needed ideological compromise in the face of capitalist class power and the exigencies of the Italian economy. In fact those critics of SASP and of the State who demanded both an extensive and ideologically committed Italian film production, which it argued could only occur if SASP was dismantled and its activities handed to small producers, these same critics after 1930, accepted the position that SASP was the only possible structure for the realisation of an Italian film production, however modest that production might be in scale or compromised in ideals.

Though I would not wish simply to argue that positions taken for film realism in Italy in the late 1920s were mere rationales of economic and class positions, I nevertheless want to examine here ideas of realism as they were articulated and complemented economic and class positions; I don't deny them their other force as ideas about the cinema or ideas of aesthetics and culture but I believe that to understand such realism (often now dismissed for its artistic conservatism) it is as well to consider its social and political position within fascism.

If I were to give a class name to theories of film realism in Italy in the late 1920s it would be that of the *petit-bourgeois*: those who put such theories forward opposed, in the name of fascism, foreign-American control, Italian monopoly capital, and 'big' Government, specifically, the direct intervention of the State in the economy and control by the State of economic institutions. Those who spoke of film realism were small entrepreneurs wanting to make films but squeezed between national and international capital, and wanting the State to act to weaken the one and repress the other in order to provide them with a space for production; indeed they proposed that SASP be fragmented and that its operations (recognised in their profitability) of distribution and exhibition be parcelled out to them so that they might finance production with profits made in distribution and exhibition . . . all this to be done in the name of a Mussolinian economic theory of decentralisation.¹²

I would not want myself to characterise American films in the 1920s but for SASP and the fascist State these films were thought of as commercial, entertainment films made for diversion and profit and not films that might be called art. Indeed Bottai, while recognising their attraction and profitability and approving such direction for the new Italian film production, noted that 'they are not informed by sound aesthetic, human, moral or national standards'. No one was deluded that these films – either American, or Italian on models that were thought to be American – had anything to do with fascism. Indeed they might even be though inimical to it, but they did have to do with fascism as an economic strategy for, variously, building a national industry or profiting a class. Pittaluga of SASP was very candid:

*I am above all things a business man . . . as for poetry, I as an industrialist, necessarily prefer prose especially when in order to realise the most beautiful dreams there are obstacles of the most practical kind in the way.*¹³

The opposition to Pittaluga's prose and to a cinema devoted to profits and diversion was made in terms of another cinema of truth, honesty, reality, art. It was argued in political terms:

*In a situation such as this the State cannot take a narrowly realistic line of conduct; les affaires sont affaires cannot be its motto. If tomorrow the most desirable commercial investment should reveal itself as the worst artistic investment, in contrast to the directives of 'style' that the Italian State and fascism demands, would the State think it on the debit or credit side of such an undertaking?*¹⁴

¹² Alessandro Blasetti, 'Danari e amministratori privati controllo ed appoggi statali', *Il Cinematografo*, June 24, 1928.

¹³ Fortunio op cit.

¹⁴ Manovella, 'Gli affari sono affari e lo Stato è Fascismo', *Il Cinematografo*, July 8, 1928.

In other words just as the State accepted the necessity for fascism to support a class and capitalist policy as in the national interest, it equally accepted the pre-eminence of economic considerations in a cultural practice which involved the sums and the profits of the film industry, and not only was this opposed (for other ideals, or more precisely other practices) but opposed from within the framework of fascism itself.

I do not believe that realism, at least during the fascist period, and even in the late 1930s and early 1940s when some argue it was anti-fascist (if so I think only in its hostility to the commercial practices of the capitalist cinema during fascism, certainly a realist cinema was not anti-fascist in a direct way), had any coherence as an artistic theory or theory of film and not only have I avoided discussing it in these terms but think it would be pure fiction to do so. When Antonioni or Visconti or Umberto Barbaro wrote of realism in the '30s, they wrote not of formal qualities, or of style but of social and political commitment and in terms that were almost always moral and humanist, such as truth and beauty and honesty and goodness.

The objection to the American cinema and later to the Italian commercial cinema was for its repression of an art cinema characterised as a realist one – meaning in practice a notion of art in which works were not produced as repetitions of models and formulas (genres), were not thereby artificial, copied, false, but were produced originally, creatively, inventively, by individuals from reality. The argument is more than familiar and much older than the intellectual fascism which recycled it.

I want to make two brief concluding remarks. The notion of a realist art cinema put forward in the 1920s (and which looked to the Soviet cinema as exemplary) was, whatever else it may have been, a marketing position taken by would-be producers in a situation of monopoly and foreign capital control: it was a proposal for a counter, independent, Italian cinema made in relation to the needs of 'the people', not for the profits of a narrow class. That notion involved a certain aestheticisation of politics. If it is true that discussions of realism during the fascist period are largely about moral and social commitment rather than about formal qualities or political action, it is because those who argued it conceptualised fascism in primarily moral terms, as a way of life, as an ethical path, as goodness, as humanity. The fascism of realism is no different than the social democracy or socialism of realism, the 'neo-realism' post-1943, a fascism 'liberalised' within a bourgeois idealist Italian tradition, culture politicised, politics culturised by both becoming a moral and ethical discourse.

Those who argued for a realist cinema in the late 1920s in Italy argued for a separation between politics and the cinema, in order to maintain art in its integrity from any political directives. (Monopoly capital argued for that separation too, to preserve politics from the boredom of political propaganda.) In the name of a fascism made ethical the separation of culture and politics directly served fascism; fascism was recast as 'culture' and culture identified with all that was good and real and true.

The fascist State anxiously sought the consensus of Italian liberal intellectuals, particularly so with the defection of Benedetto Croce in 1925 from support of fascism. The formulation of fascist cultural policy was

¹⁵ Requoted from Elio Vittorini, *Diario in Pubblico*, (1929-1956), Bompiani, 1957, p 298.

¹⁶ Franco Fortini, 'Cos'è stato Il Politecnico?', in *Nuovi Argomenti*, no 1, March-April, 1953, p 195, requoted from Mario Canella, 'Ideology and Aesthetic Hypotheses in the Criticism of the Neo-Realism', *Screen*, vol 14 no 4, Winter 1973/74, p 16.

by intellectuals of an idealist Crocean stamp, notably Giovanni Gentile, Minister for Education, and in areas like the cinema a student of Croce and admirer of Gentile, Luigi Chiarini, later director of the national film school (Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia), who, like so many, Rossellini included, moved without difficulty from making films supporting the regime before 1943 to films attacking it after 1943. One of Chiarini's more incredible slogans was 'Art for Art's Sake' in the name of fascist culture. In other words, the price fascism paid (and that was demanded of it) for intellectual support was virtually to leave the liberal intellectual cultural tradition intact and, in effect, to support the Crocean notion of the necessity to separate art from politics to the mutual benefit of both; it was, perhaps, the reason, not only for the relative cultural liberalism during the fascist period, but the fact that 1943 seems hardly a break at all. Realism and neo-realism, before and after that date, are virtually the same. Neither the films made nor the languages of their criticism and theorisation alter, as if fascism had made no difference, at least not to the liberal culture to which Italian realism belonged. Croce thought of fascism as an interruption, a tear in the fabric of Italian liberalism; it was, on the contrary, its continuity and not only in cultural terms, but, more crucially, in social ones. And, Italian capitalism it must be remembered, wanted the State not to tamper with films, lest politics endanger profits.

I want to close with two quotations which bring us, nearly, up-to-date. The first, from 1947, is by Elio Vittorini from *Il Politecnico*, a journal devoted to the post-war, post-fascism radical reconstruction of Italian culture:

*In the course of history only an autonomous culture has 'enriched' politics and thereby 'objectively' served it; but a politicised culture, reduced to an instrument of influence, or, at best, deprived of its own sense and direction, has no value to render nor action to take except that of an employee for the firm.*¹⁵

The second, from 1953, was written to Vittorini by the marxist writer, Franco Fortini:

*The error which even you seem to fall into sometimes is that of believing that the unity of culture and politics is something provisional, a marriage of convenience . . . For myself on the contrary it seems clear that . . . the two are the same . . . that, in short, a distinction can be made only between two theories or two practices; and that each time a theory is not or only tenuously linked to practice, or practice is not or only tenuously linked to theory, then that 'theory' will be very abstract, and that 'political practice' very vulgar.*¹⁶

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MY NAME IS JOSEPH H LEWIS

PAUL KERR RE-PLACES THE AUTHOR

¹ John Caughie (ed) *Theories of Authorship*, London, British Film Institute and Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. See also Stephen Jenkins (ed) *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look*, London, British Film Institute, 1981. Jenkins conceives of 'Lang' neither biographically nor structurally, since the former assumes a romantic artist behind every aspect of 'his' work, while the latter 'implies that such a structure exists as something to be grasped.' Instead, Jenkins addresses 'Lang' as a 'space where a multiplicity of discourses intersect, an unstable, shifting configuration of discourses produced by the interaction of a specific group of films (Lang's filmography) with particular, historically and socially locatable ways of reading/viewing those films', p 7.

DESPITE THE RECENT PUBLICATION of John Caughie's excellent anthology, *Theories of Authorship*¹, auteurism has been conspicuously absent from the agenda of *Screen*² in particular and film studies in general of late. But auteurism refuses to go away. It crops up in Festival retrospectives, in the programming of repertory cinemas, as the organising principle behind cinema seasons on television, in educational syllabuses and among the assumptions of articles in *Screen* itself. Indeed there remains, as Caughie argues, a reluctant sense in which while it is assumed that authorship (in both its traditional humanist 'exception to the Hollywood rule' and its post-structuralist 'subject's construction of and by a reading' guises) is an inadequate critical concept, it is difficult – if not altogether impossible – to entirely dispense with it. Caughie's anthology itself collects much of the best writing on the relation between texts and authors but is quick to acknowledge the relative absence of work on the relation between authors and contexts. Understandably dubious of the liberal extensions of auteurism to embrace non-directorial personnel and similarly sceptical about the contextualising work done on Hollywood genres and Hollywood as industry³, Caughie admits that his book

*has very little to say on the place of the author within institutions (industrial, cultural, academic), or on the way in which the author is constructed by and for commerce. Partly this reflects a dissatisfaction with most of what has been written, which has tended to remain within the romantic concept of the artist, with its concentration on questions of artistic freedom and industrial interference, and with its continual desire to identify the true author out of the complex of creative personnel. At the same time, questions of the author's relation to institutional and commercial contexts are increasingly being recognized as crucial...*⁴

This article attempts to sketch out – if not yet to fill in – some of the gaps discussed by Caughie concerning the place of the author within those institutions.

The title of this piece has both a playful and a polemical purpose. Playful because it marries the title of Joseph H Lewis' first major success, *My Name Is Julia Ross*, with an echo of the first clause of John Ford's famous statement 'My name is John Ford. I make Westerns.' Unlike

Ford, Lewis – in spite or perhaps because of the cult status of some few of his films – is not familiar enough to assume such an easy equivalence with a directorial oeuvre, let alone to conjure up a conventional genre, nor can his name even be relied upon to guarantee recognition among readers of specialist journals like *Screen*. And this, to risk repeating myself, is important. There is no obvious genre that Lewis can claim to have made his own – as Ford could modestly associate himself with the Western. Lewis began and ended his career with Westerns, but in between was a decade or more in which he made none at all and it is that decade, in which he essayed the musical, the comedy, the war film and the crime thriller, with which I am primarily concerned here, and in which Lewis made his name as a director. Indeed, if it can be said that Lewis made any categorisable and consistent type of film at all in those years then the critical consensus can suggest only two coherent candidates for such continuity. First, that they are all ‘Lewis’ films, a formulation which simply elides the problem by transforming the auteur canon itself into a virtual genre; and second, that they are all ‘B’ films destined for the bottom half of Hollywood’s double bills.

There is, however, a third and rather more contentious case to be made for Lewis: indeed, a number of critics have already argued that the bulk of his 1945–1955 output falls into the category now known as *film noir*. This may, of course, be no more than a symptom of the very real difficulty auteurs have experienced attempting to define and describe these films. Nevertheless, their eccentricities, their excessiveness, their expressiveness as texts of and for their time, combined with their centrality in, their representativeness of a particular professional strategy at a specific moment and mode of the American cinema’s, and indeed the American film industry’s, development is what interests me now.

This article grew out of a paper I presented at the 1980 Edinburgh Film Festival which included a pretty comprehensive retrospective of Lewis’ films. That retrospective itself says a great deal about Lewis’ standing in 1980 though the conclusions reached by the various contributors to the event all share the conviction that Lewis is and was something of an unsuitable case for the Edinburgh treatment. It is also significant that the Edinburgh Retrospective, unlike many of its predecessors, did not transfer to the National Film Theatre in London or inspire a tie-in publication. On the other hand, this article itself is a part of the expanding Lewis bibliography. The draft presented in Edinburgh was itself derived from an earlier article published in *Screen Education*⁵ and this case study of Lewis, however schematic, presents an opportunity for amending the more obvious weaknesses and filling in some of the more gaping omissions of that previous piece. What it does not attempt is textual analysis – not because this is not considered crucial in relocating authors in institutions, but because there are several very useful examples of such analyses already available.⁶

What follows can be divided into three relatively distinct parts: first, a claim for the surprisingly continuous results of, but historically and institutionally extremely diverse reasons for, expending energy in famil-

² See, however, Steve Neale’s article ‘Authors and Genres’ in *Screen* vol 23 no 2, pp 84–89.

³ Caughie, *op cit*, p 14.

⁴ *ibid*, p 2.

⁵ Paul Kerr, ‘Out Of What Past? Notes on the B Film Noir’, *Screen Education* nos 32/33, Autumn/Winter 1979/80, pp 45–65.

⁶ A number of such textual analyses are referred to in the footnotes to this article. See below.

⁷ See Janet Staiger's overview of the shift to independent production in this issue of *Screen*.

⁸ Edward Buscombe, 'Walsh and Warner Brothers' in Phil Hardy (ed) *Raoul Walsh*, Edinburgh Film Festival, 1974. See also Steve Jenkins' article 'Edgar G Ulmer and PRC: A Detour down Poverty Row', in *Monthly Film Bulletin* July 1982, vol 49 no 582, p 152.

iarising exhibitors, audiences and critics with Lewis' name; second, a sketch of the landmarks in the industrial terrain in which Lewis operated and a discussion of the ways in which 'he' achieved some of the 'effects' for which he has since been celebrated; and third, a survey of the history of attempts to construct Lewis as an author within the critical and academic institutions.

In 1942 the United States government reached a temporary settlement with the major studios in the so-called Paramount Case and, for the 'big five' vertically integrated majors at least, the twin practices of block booking and blind selling were either effectively curtailed or banned outright.⁷ For the first time all their products had to be sold to exhibitors individually and this included 'B' films which were even, occasionally, now subject to press previews and trade shows. Relatively rapidly B films were encouraged to become increasingly competitive, compulsorily and compulsively different, distinctive. What had previously, perhaps, been a rather static aesthetic and occupational hierarchy between Bs and As became suddenly more flexible. No longer could a company like Columbia guarantee outlets for its films in blocks—it had to sell them singly and it could consequently no longer rely on its own 'trade name' to attract exhibitors or assure quality. Rather paradoxically perhaps, one of the avenues this opened up among the 'ambitious Bs' involved the contravention of current formulas and standard stylistic practices (too often referred to as the Classic Hollywood style), as indulgence in excess, individuality, idiosyncrasy, virtuosity as if for its own sake. Within these differences, however, residues of Hollywood's cinematic standardisation remained. First, of course, the constraints within which such 'experiments' took place were real and tight; secondly, the conventions against which such reactions were expressed remained relatively common among a large number of different film-makers wishing to 'make a name for themselves'; and thirdly, in order for a director like Lewis to differentiative his work from that of his contemporaries he would be obliged to standardise his own style wherever possible, for purposes of recognition—and reward.

Today, the naming of such directors as Fuller, Karlson, Mann, Ray, Siodmak, Tourneur, Ulmer and so on continues for rather different reasons. At the level of British distribution and exhibition there remains a need to 'authorise' Hollywood directorial retrospective repertory screenings as Art in order to attract art-cinema audiences otherwise antipathetic to American cinema; film critics, meanwhile, require authors to 'credit' for the films they review in columns still dominated by the methods of literary criticism. And at a more academic level, the fashion for *film noir* in particular and for Hollywood's post-war years in general which has characterised the 1970s and early '80s can be understood as nostalgia for a certain style, specifically a style which contravened not only the supposed 'standard practices' of the time but also the theoretical accounts of more generalised Hollywood practices articulated in *Screen* and elsewhere. More cynically, it adds another 'individual' name to the 'traditional' pantheon of teachable 'talents'. Finally, the presence of tele-

vision, historically, has not only had an arguable effect on the development of *film noir* but also – it is often alleged – complied readily and in an almost parodic manner with some at least of the rules of that realism which *film noir* has been hailed as having broken.

Attempting to locate the author, Lewis, in the place and time of Hollywood in the late forties and early fifties is far from simple. In 1974 Edward Buscombe, writing an article for another of Edinburgh's Hollywood director retrospectives – this time on Raoul Walsh – sought, by sketching out the 'house style' of Warner Brothers, where Walsh worked continuously for some years, and relating it, albeit tentatively, to that studio's industrial structure, to 'call into question the simple notion of Walsh as an auteur who dictated the style and contents of his pictures'⁹. Instead, Buscombe argued that

*working for a studio with as distinctive a policy and style as Warners imposed a number of constraints on any director. Yet these constraints should not be thought of as merely negative in their operation. Working for the studio meant simply that the possibilities for good work lay in certain directions rather than in others.*⁹

In attempting to adapt Buscombe's approach to a specific period in the cinematic career of Joseph H Lewis, a number of problems rapidly appear. First of all, Lewis – unlike Walsh (or, for that matter, Ford) – was never exclusively involved with a single studio for more than four or five consecutive years. From the first film he directed, in 1937 to the last, in 1958, Lewis worked at Grand National (1937), then Universal (1937-38), then Columbia (1940), then Monogram (1940-41), then PRC (1941), then Universal again (1942), back to PRC (1944), then RKO (1945), Columbia again (1945-49), then for the King Brothers (distributed by United Artists, 1950), then MGM (1950), then for United States Pictures (distributed by Warner Brothers, 1951), then back to MGM (1952-53), then for Security-Theodora Productions (distributed by Allied Artists, 1955), then for Scott-Brown (distributing through Columbia, 1955-56), and finally two films for Collier Young Associates and Seltzer Films (both of which were distributed by United Artists, 1957-58). Whether this almost incessant mobility is more characteristic of the Bs than of more prestigious productions or whether it is more specific to Lewis is difficult to determine. The number of companies that Lewis worked for, however, together with the fact that the peak period of his career coincides with the decline (and divorce) of the vertically integrated studio system (as the presence of so many independents towards the end of the Lewis list bears out), suggests that a director/studio study is inappropriate here. Furthermore, as an unprestigious director Lewis' career is relatively undocumented. In order to overcome some at least of these problems I restrict my attention here to an industrially defined (sub-) genre, the B *film noir*, an area in which, it has been argued, a large proportion of Lewis' 1945-55 output can comfortably be situated; this focus allows me to draw in some detail on my *Screen Education* article.

⁹ Buscombe op cit, p 60. That such 'constraints' and 'directions' could be much more than simply stylistic is central to Buscombe's argument. While Lewis' career at Columbia is too brief to benefit from the kind of studio/director study devoted to Walsh and Warners, it is worth noting that elsewhere Buscombe has published an article on Columbia itself, 'Notes on Columbia Pictures Corporation 1926-41', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 65-82. In this article Buscombe addressed the question of Columbia's studio style and political affiliations, asking whether or not that company's relative independence from Wall Street finance freed its film-makers politically. Buscombe's conclusion is negative, but he does point out that precisely half of the Hollywood Ten were employed at Columbia in the 1930s. Among the radicals/black-listees that Lewis worked with at the studio were Larry Parks (who starred in *The Jolson Story* and *The Swordsman*),

Sydney Buchman (who was an uncredited contributor to the script of *The Jolson Story*), Robert Rossen (who produced *Undercover Man*) and Nedrick Young (who appeared in *The Swordsman* and who worked with Lewis on and off throughout his career after they had both left Columbia).

¹⁰ Kerr, op cit, p 45.

There I associated the development of the B *film noir* with what I called 'a negotiated resistance to the realist aesthetic on the one hand and an accommodation to restricted expenditure on the other'¹⁰, a formula which should become clearer in the following paragraphs. Very schematically, the argument boils down to the conviction that *film noir*, far from being reducible to a specific socio-political atmosphere, aesthetic ancestry or a set of émigré authorial signatures actually related to the particular conditions of its production, distribution and exhibition. Indeed, I suggested that *film noir* combined an economically determined 'low budget' mode with an ideologically determined 'anti-realist' mode. What I did not discuss in that article, and what I would like to briefly draw attention to here, are what Althusserians would describe as the political determinants of the genre.

Very briefly, I would suggest that the B *film noir* is an ambitious B, a B bidding for critical and/or commercial prestige. The Supreme Court rulings against blind selling and block booking encouraged and indeed obliged the B companies (and the B units within the majors, though perhaps here the pressures were somewhat diluted and delayed) to inject an element of expressive individuality into their products. At the same time the shift to independent production (partly accelerated by tax incentives) and the rise of the Directors Guild professionalised the directors, reaffirming the rhetoric of individuation, creativity and differentiation. The Directors Guild, founded in 1936, succeeded in drawing up an agreement with the studios in 1939 recognising the creative function of the director, ensuring salary minimums and safeguarding contracts.

Low key lighting – a characteristic as common to *film noir* as it was rare in other contemporary genres and almost entirely absent from the thrillers of the previous decade – functioned simultaneously to conceal the meagre production values of the B *film noir* while itself constituting a striking style. This propensity away from realist denotation toward 'expressionist' connotation was also a consequence of (and could cash in on) the constraints of the Production Code. Furthermore, the 'hybrid' quality of the *film noir* was perhaps, at least in part, attributable to increasing studio insecurities about marketing their B product (covering all their generic options, as it were, in each and every film). The experience of directors like Lewis in companies as different as MGM and PRC and genres as distinct as spy films, horror films, musical westerns, screwball comedies and war films – experiences denied many contemporary directors who worked only at the prestige end of the industry – may also have contributed to the curiously cross-generic quality of the B *film noir*. Similarly, if low key lighting styles, for example, were more economic than their high key alternatives they were also dramatically and distinctively different from them, from the A films that tended to employ them and from the new technologies of Technicolor, television and deep focus, all of which necessitated high key.

By the end of the 1950s the studio system, the double bill, black and white cinematography, the Production Code, the very status of cinema as the most popular – and profitable – art were all being eroded. In their

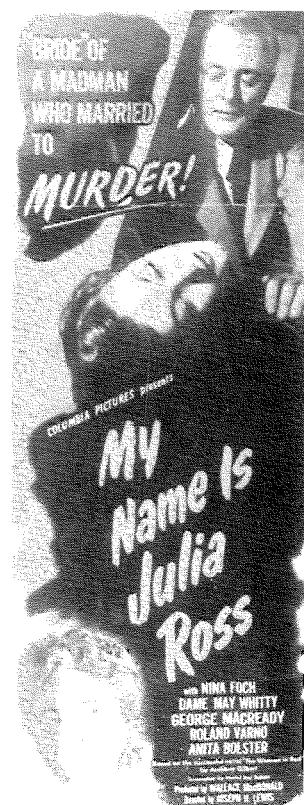
place, a shift was already taking place to independent production, to single feature programmes, colour cinematography, wide and small screens and an audience classification system. The period of this transition, the period in which the equation between black and white on the one hand and realism on the other was at its most fragile is that of the B film noir, the period in which Joseph H Lewis made his name.

Between 1945 and 1955 Lewis directed twelve films; of these, one is a light comedy, one is a swashbuckler and another a (noirish) war film. The other nine are *The Falcon in San Francisco* (1945), *My Name is Julia Ross* (1945), *So Dark the Night* (1946), *The Undercover Man* (1949), *Gun Crazy* (1950), *A Lady Without Passport* (1950), *Desperate Search* (1952), *Cry of the Hunted* (1953) and *The Big Combo* (1955). The latter was his last black and white film and his last film noir. Lewis' career in cinema continued with four Technicolor Westerns; he then turned to television where he continued to direct episodes of Western series into the 1960s.

Before looking in any detail at the production of any of Lewis' B films noirs (all of which had running times under 90 minutes and almost all of which were made on the conventionally derisory schedules and budgets of the second feature), it is worth making a few observations about his earlier career. Lewis had worked as a director for almost ten years by this time at the smaller B companies and in the B units of the 'little three' majors. Consequently he was already identified (as many B directors were) with specific series of second features, in Lewis' case the Bob Baker/Fuzzy Knight singing Westerns and the Bowery Boys films. *The Falcon in San Francisco* was also one of a series of RKO Falcon films but Lewis' employment there seems to have been on a strictly one-off contract. Perhaps the ever-fluid administration at RKO meant that for a director to exercise any consistent or coherent 'creativity' there s/he needed a strong producer/production unit behind which to shelter (viz Val Lewton). From RKO Lewis turned to Columbia where he was to make the film that was to bring him critical and even commercial success for the first time. At Columbia, the production unit structure seems to have exercised considerably less importance than at RKO; at Columbia, the crucial factor seems to have been the favour of Harry Cohn.

Lewis worked at Columbia from 1945-49, his most prolonged period with any company. His first film there was *My Name Is Julia Ross*, a project he claims to have chosen for himself and for which he was allocated a twelve-day shooting schedule and a 125,000 dollar budget – limits which Lewis apparently exceeded by four or five days and 50,000 dollars respectively.¹¹ Having gone considerably over both budget and schedule without severe reprimand Lewis even managed to secure a sneak preview for the finished film (which ran only 65 minutes) – an apparently almost unprecedented event for a B film but presumably a part of Columbia's new 'ambitious B' strategy. According to Lewis the film grossed four or five million dollars; certainly Lewis' future with Columbia was guaranteed and positive reviews by the likes of James Agee together with a New York Critics Award cannot have damaged the film's chances.

¹¹ These and other figures in this article derive from Peter Bogdanovich's interview with Lewis in *Cinema* Fall 1971, vol 7 no 1, and from Gerald Peary's interview in *Positif* July/August 1975, nos 171-172. They have not been verified against the extensive Lewis material held by the Chicago Institute of Art.



¹² Quoted in Doug McClelland, *The Golden Age of B Movies*, Bonanza Books, 1978, p. 146.

The little three companies (Columbia, Universal and United Artists – so-called to distinguish them from the theatre-owning big five: Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox, MGM, Warner Brothers and RKO) had refused to sign the 1940 Consent Decree eliminating blind selling and block booking among the majors. Compliance with the Decree obliged the majors to introduce trade shows for all their films and to opt for a maximum of five films per sales package. With their theatre chains regularly hungry for new product the majors understandably opted for the continuation of the mass production system which they had already operated for more than a decade. The minors, on the other hand, decided to slim down, producing fewer, better films. The little three's refusal to endorse the Decree did not prevent the other majors from transforming the industry. Paramount, RKO and Fox reduced their selling blocks to five; MGM went to blocks of ten, Warners and UA used unit sales while Columbia and Universal stayed with full season blocks. But the Big Five's transformed strategy inevitably influenced even the least flexible companies: selling by studio brand name became increasingly untenable, even for companies like Columbia which still sold films in large blocks; and B competition and consequent differentiation intensified. Thus, Columbia's ambitious risk with *My Name Is Julia Ross* was reprised elsewhere, especially in the B film noir. At Universal, Siodmak's *The Killers* began as a B; at Fox Preminger's *Laura* had similar low-budget origins and was destined for the bottom half of the bill; and at Warner Brothers Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* was also allegedly conceived and cast as a second feature. Lewis describes in *Positif* how Columbia could not stretch to a budget for extras on *Julia Ross* (each of whom would have cost fifteen dollars a day) but forced him to create an 'English' atmosphere through imaginative assembly of stock footage, studio streets and sets, fog, fountains and back projection. James Agee, in the *Nation*, wrote 'The film is well planned, mostly well played, well directed and in a somewhat boomhappy way, well photographed – all around, a likeable, unpretentious, generally successful attempt to turn good trash into decently artful entertainment.'¹²

At the success of *Julia Ross* Columbia encouraged Lewis to direct another 'crime melodrama' (a phrase that recurs throughout the trade press reviews of Lewis' films noirs, as well as those of other directors). Based on an inexpensive *Readers' Digest* story, the script of *So Dark the Night* necessitated twenty days shooting and a French town set but Lewis' B budget – probably no more than for *Julia Ross* – could not meet the twenty dollars a day that Fox demanded in rent for theirs. Lewis has described in some detail how he and his art director and sketch artist walked round the Columbia back lot looking for a possible, passable location:

We walked around that back lot which was over in the valley, I'll bet you six times, and I kept coming back to one spot. One spot. And that one spot – there was a town – they had made a war film and they bombed the hell out of it, and half a church was left. And the buildings were just demolished. And I was inspired by that steeple, that church steeple. And we walked around into

a field . . . Now this is just a field—no sets, nothing—and way in the background is that steeple. And I looked at the art director and I said ‘if you took a bulldozer and you made a winding road here, and a dirt road that led past that steeple; and you took a thatched roof in the foreground, just a roof and a side of a building, and over here further back in perspective so you have it, you know, one in the foreground, one in the background, to cover up all the burned-out buildings and everything, and you had another flat there, and down this sliding road I saw a little donkey cart or some French villager came or an automobile came, would I give the impression of a French village?’ And the art director leapt for joy, and by the time I had finished, the sketch artist had drawn a French village for me with two flats in the foreground and out of a field we made a dirt road. That’s the French village . . .

When the girl is found dead, the little French guy comes running up to her mother and there’s a long dialogue scene where he tells her mother the girl is dead and she screams and cries and all that. And I got on the set and I rehearsed it and I said oh, no, no, no, impossible. How can I supply dialogue to meet this kind of situation? And so, I threw out all the dialogue . . . I put the camera outside of the house and way in the background was a big window that was cut up into about sixteen different little panes and there you saw the mother busy polishing some silverware or something. And through the scene as taken from outside the farmhouse, in runs this little Frenchman, but in extreme long shot, and he runs through the house and he disappears behind a wall and then reveals himself in front of this window. They’re two tiny figures . . . in an extreme long shot and you can’t hear. He’s talking of course, but you can’t hear it. We’re shooting it, you know, without sound. And the only noise, shattering noise, that you hear when she drops that silver platter or whatever it was, and that’s all you see . . .¹³

¹³ Lewis interviewed by Bogdanovich, *op cit*, p 48.

The point of reprinting these anecdotes here is not to salute the ‘imagination’ of the director and his production team but rather to acknowledge the complex ways in which the much commented-on ‘Bressonian’ sparseness of Lewis’ settings and yet the fluid ‘Ophulsian’ manner of his shooting style both originate precisely in the industrial constraints under which the film was made. Once again Cohn and the Columbia hierarchy were happy with the result and, by way of promotion, ‘miscast’ Lewis to direct the musical sequences in the far more prestigious and hugely successful Larry Parks vehicle *The Jolson Story*. This was followed by two further, equally uncharacteristic projects: a second Parks vehicle, *The Swordsman*, and an unsuccessful Cary Grant style comedy about a man reincarnated as a horse, *The Return of October*. Finally, Lewis was allowed to return to the path he had begun to carve out with *Julia Ross*, and directed his third crime melodrama for Columbia, *The Undercover Man*. Here again, in spite of the film’s B status, Lewis was allowed unusual license, including the luxury of a three camera set-up (quite a conventional A film technique but, because of its expense, almost unheard of among Bs), and even rehearsal time for an improvisatory dialogue scene. (Once again, censorship pressures prevented a straightforward, denotative narrative of the Capone case on which the script was based; instead, Capone’s identity behind the ‘big fellow’ could only be connoted by careful recreation of Capone’s familiar hat.) *Time* magazine commented ‘Director Joseph H Lewis has turned out a neat little job. It

¹⁴ Quoted in
McClelland, op
cit, p 186.

is more entertaining than most of the better-advertised movies it will get paired with on double feature bills . . . It just goes to show that thoughtful direction and handsome camera work can lift a mediocre movie a long way above its humble origins.¹⁴

In respect of my general remarks about the industrial imperatives of *film noir* it is perhaps pertinent here to mention that it was in 1945, Lewis' first year at Columbia, that that company was finally formally charged with conspiracy to infringe the Anti-Trust laws; indeed, the very same issue of the *Motion Picture Herald* (November 17, 1945) which reviewed *Julia Ross* also carried an article about the Anti-Trust suit and the probable outcome and consequences of the then imminent decision on block booking. Similarly, the same issue of the *MPH* (September 4, 1946) in which *So Dark the Night* was reviewed included news of Columbia's response to those charges and that decision. It is also worth noting that it was in 1945 that Columbia first employed Technicolor as well as the cheaper Cinecolor process. In 1949, following the Anti-Trust case conclusion, which finally outlawed the film industry's vertical integration and instructed the majors to divest themselves of their theatrical holdings, Columbia decided to discontinue the last of its B series (including crime thriller series like *Boston Blackie* and *Crime Doctor*) and concentrate its efforts on the ambitious B and modest A end of the industry; the same year it was the first of the majors to launch its own television subsidiary, Screen Gems. Much could be said about the determining role of Columbia studios as a structuring 'author' of Lewis'



films there in the early 1940s; similarly, it is clearly worth considering the contribution of contract cameraman Burnett Guffey who was cinematographer on *Julia Ross*, *So Dark the Night* and *The Undercover Man*. Suffice it to say here, though, that such considerations cannot displace Lewis entirely from the films that carry his credit as director.

Lewis followed *Undercover Man* by leaving Columbia (for unknown reasons) and working for the King Brothers, an independent and slightly suspect production outfit distributing through United Artists. According to Lewis, the King Brothers were extremely generous and non-interfering and his budget and schedule were consequently increased from their Columbia levels. The King Brothers had apparently made their money installing slot machines and were anxious to legitimate themselves by going Hollywood. Based on MacKinlay Kantor's *Saturday Evening Post* story, *Gun Crazy* cost about 450,000 dollars and took 30 days to shoot, even employing a new portable sound system for the famous two mile location tracking shot. Contemporary critics and filmmakers apparently besieged Lewis with queries about the mysterious multiple back projection technique the sequence seemed to have demanded: they could not believe that it was actually shot from the back of a car driven down a street on location in a single take. But Lewis had learned to experiment with exceptionally long takes and unconventional location tracking shots much earlier in his career, with, for example, the celebrated ten minute, single-take court room sequence in *The Silent Witness* and the polo pony-mounted cameraman in *The Spy Ring* (1938). United Artists, who had arranged to distribute *Gun Crazy*, offered the King Brothers a sum of money to take the latter's names off the film but they refused. Perhaps as a result of—or in retribution for—this conflict UA were reluctant to push the film and it was eventually launched twice, once under an alternative title, *Deadly Is the Female*. UA had been named, along with the rest of the majors, in the 1948 Anti-Trust decision and, despite its own lack of theatres, had to adapt to meet the needs of a changing market. An administrative reshuffle in 1950 had led to a new regime and a new distribution strategy: under Krim and Benjamin the new policy involved the active pursuit of quality Bs or what were considered bargain basement As.

From the King Brothers, Lewis went to the other end of the prestige spectrum, MGM, to direct a film entitled *A Lady without Passport*. On this occasion, instead of being expected to create an atmospheric set out of virtually nothing—as at Columbia—Lewis was able to exploit MGM's extensive backlot and existing sets from previous features. The main bordertown set in *A Lady without Passport*, in fact, is a revised version of the Verona Square set on MGM's lot 2, which had been built for *Romeo and Juliet* in 1936. *A Lady without Passport* was one of the first of MGM's quasi-documentary crime cycle of second features, fictionalising the *Crime Does Not Pay* format (a 1935-48 MGM series) but expanding the two-reeler length. (Lewis complains in *Positif* that the presence of Hedy Lamarr in the cast unnecessarily glamourised the project.) In 1948, the year of the Anti-Trust decision, Dore Schary had been



¹⁵ Interview with Broidy in Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy (eds) *Kings of the Bs*, E. P. Dutton, 1975, p 271.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 272.

¹⁷ See Robert Mundy's untitled article in *Cinema* Fall 1971, vol 7 no 1.

appointed as head of MGM's B productions and immediately set about supervising the transformation of the studio's formulaic series, serials and spin-off properties into fewer, better Bs, Bs which would simultaneously 'express' and 'exploit' topical issues like, in this case, the plight of illegal immigrants. Lewis left MGM after *A Lady without Passport* and made a war film for Warner Brothers, *Retreat, Hell!* but returned in 1952 to make *Desperate Search* and *Cry of the Hunted* (1953). It was not until 1955, however, towards the end of the *film noir* period, that Lewis was to direct his last and most fully blown work in the genre. *The Big Combo* was distributed by Allied Artists and that company's president at that time, Steve Broidy, has described the 'nervous A' (as ambitious Bs and modest As were sometimes known) as an important strategy in Monogram's 'premeditated attempt to upgrade our status in the industry', an attempt to achieve 'a percentage deal, as opposed to the flat rental'¹⁵ fee for the second features and the new co-features it was providing for exhibition:

*One of the big things that kept us from making as much progress as we deserved to make, at a time when we were making a fairly good run of product, was the fact that the exhibitor, in those days, bought pictures based on the precedent he had paid for product . . . That's what led to the creation of Allied Artists. It was the same company, same personnel, same everything, but we created a totally different image by calling it Allied Artists.*¹⁶

Thus, in 1953, Monogram changed its name. Only one of Lewis' films was ever distributed by the company but as an example of the new strategy it is as good as any other – a gangster film for 'adults', full of 'sock, shock and brutality' (*Hollywood Reporter*, February 10, 1955), 'grim, sordid, sexy and candid . . . likely to satisfy most adults . . . but in no sense a film for children' (*Motion Picture Herald*, February 19, 1955). Describing the torture scene, *Variety* was rather less generous, commenting that 'The moronic fringe of sadists will enjoy this and all the little kiddies will be sick to their stomachs' (February 16, 1955). *The Big Combo* is undoubtedly the blackest of Lewis' *films noirs*; the cinematographer was John Alton and, in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the reviewer restricted his comments entirely to Alton's contribution. But it is, in fact, a very understated film – Robert Mundy, for instance, has remarked on the subjectively shot and recorded machine-gun sequence and the sexuality of the Jean Wallace character, both of which pushed at the Production Code but, by virtue of their very subtlety, escaped the censor's scissors.¹⁷

At the time, however, (as well as ever since) most critics focused on a comparison between Lewis' *Big Combo* and Lang's 1953 film *The Big Heat*, generally asserting the former's indebtedness and alleged inferiority to the latter. (A similar comparison has haunted almost every article about *Gun Crazy*, which is traditionally measured up against Ray's *They Live by Night*, Lang's *You Only Live Once* and Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*.) Essentially, Lewis is accused of plagiarism at the level of both plot, style and even title, but the accusation is extremely uninformed. Firstly

because the American film industry and the American cinema both depended—as did genre cinema in general and *film noir* in particular—on repetitions, conventions and familiar formulas. Thus the plot of *The Big Combo* (1955), scripted by Phillip Yordan, was indeed based to some extent at least on the success of *The Big Heat*. And *The Big Heat* (1953) was scripted by Sydney Boehm, produced by Columbia and starred Glenn Ford. Four years earlier, in 1949, Columbia had produced another film with a very similar plot-line, also scripted by Sydney Boehm and also starring Glenn Ford. The film was called *Undercover Man* and it was directed by Joseph H Lewis.

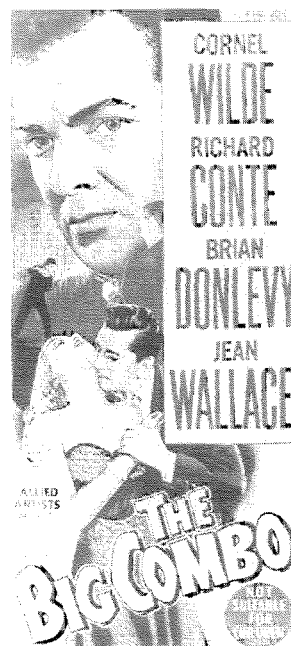
The point of this anecdote is not to prove Lewis somehow more original than Lang, but simply to illustrate how self-perpetuatingly the hierarchies of value within film culture (and all its institutions) function. *Undercover Man* was a B film, for all its ambitions. It was well enough received and did reasonably enough at the box office but Lewis, unlike Lang, was never a name to put up in lights; he was not a German émigré, veteran of UFA expressionism, but a contract director, verteran of PRC. Most importantly, he was a B not an A director. Consequently, *Undercover Man* was not sold with the same sort of energy or expectations as accompanied *The Big Heat*. It received less press coverage, fewer prints were struck, its theatrical run was brief. All these factors put severe constraints on the possibilities for retrospectives and re-viewings (and, thus, for rejigging the pantheon). In Britain and American—though this is perhaps less true of France—the criteria employed for the selection and preservation of films in the National Archives and equivalent bodies bore (and still bears) a direct relation to their respective critical and/or commercial success. If a film is considered to be critically prestigious enough it will be acquired and preserved, budgetary constraints permitting; if, on the other hand, the film is a big box-office success and/or a big budget production then it is likely that among the large number of prints produced one will eventually find its way into the archives, often via donation. But a film like *Undercover Man* and, by extension, not only all of Lewis' work but B films in general, fits neither of these categories; it remains forever outside the self-perpetuating system of profitability and prestige which is so scrupulously guarded and guaranteed by the allocation of production finance and facilities, by Academy Awards, and so on. In the event, the print of *Undercover Man* destined for Edinburgh almost fell apart under the strain of projection.

Which brings me to the role of the cultural, academic and critical institutions in the history of attempted 'authorisations' of Lewis. Tim Palleine, in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*¹⁸, has usefully traced some of the English language perspectives on Lewis and while what follows is certainly no more comprehensive than Palleine's account it does cover a longer period and a wider area. Paul Willemen, in his Edinburgh article on Lewis¹⁹, relates the apparent retrospective interest in Lewis to what he describes as 'the phenomenon of cinephilia' which he associates with the 'residues of surrealism in post-war French culture'²⁰. Richard Thompson, in his piece in *Cinema*, sees *Gun Crazy* as a precursor of the

¹⁸ Tim Palleine, 'Undercover Director or: The Name is Joseph H Lewis' in *Monthly Film Bulletin* March 1980, vol 47 no 554, p 60.

¹⁹ Paul Willemen's paper is reprinted, with a new afterword, under the heading 'Edinburgh—Debate', *Framework* no 19, pp 48-50.

²⁰ *ibid*, p 49.



²¹ Richard Thompson's untitled article on Lewis appeared in *Cinema* Fall 1971, vol 7 no 1, with articles by Schrader and Mundy and an interview by Peter Bogdanovich (op cit). Tom Milne has also referred to an alleged influence on Godard in his review of *Gun Crazy* in *Monthly Film Bulletin* March 1980, vol 47 no 554, p 57.

²² Quoted by Thompson, op cit, p 46.

²³ Quoted by Thompson, *ibid*.

²⁴ Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema*, New York, Dutton, 1968, pp 132-133.

²⁵ Andrew Sarris, 'The High Forties Revisited', *Film Culture* no 24, Spring 1962, p 66.

²⁶ The interview makes a useful comparison with Bogdanovich's previously published 'interview books', *Fritz Lang in America*, Movie Paperbacks, Studio Vista, 1967 and *John Ford*, Movie Paperbacks, Studio Vista, 1968.

nouvelle vague and elsewhere the film has been estimated as an influence on Godard in general and *A Bout de Souffle* in particular.²¹ Avoiding such problematic but provocative notions, however, Willemen is undoubtedly right to point to the French and specifically the surrealists as being (among) the first serious critics to acknowledge Lewis. Ado Kyrrou's *Le Surréalisme au Cinéma* (1953) describes *Gun Crazy* as 'an admirable film, which alone of all cinema clearly marks the road which leads from l'amour fou to la revolte folle'.²² Two years later, the publication of Borde and Chaumeton's *Panorama du Film Noir Américain* (1955), the first booklength study of the genre, also saluted that film as deserving 'a place by itself' as 'a nearly unclassifiable work... a kind of Golden Age of American film noir...'.²³

In the United States it seems that Andrew Sarris was one of the first to take Lewis seriously, (perhaps through the critic's connections with the American *Cahiers*); in his book, *American Cinema*, Sarris slots Lewis into a section entitled 'expressive esoterica' alongside the likes of Budd Boetticher, Phil Karlson, Don Siegel, Robert Siodmak, Jacques Tourneur and Edward G Ulmer. Sarris saluted Lewis' 'somber personality... revealed consistently through a complex visual style' but today Lewis remains one of the only directors so relegated to have resisted promotion.²⁴ In 1962 Sarris had issued a challenge in the page of *Film Culture*, warning Lewis' admirers that 'in this direction lies madness'²⁵—a warning that the writer was to withdraw the following year, but which has somehow stayed alive through the terms of appraisal Lewis' critics have employed ever since, from Sarris' 'expressive esoterica' to Willemen's 'cinophilia'. In 1971, the American magazine *Cinema* (then edited by Paul Schrader) devoted eleven pages to Lewis, comprising three articles, an interview²⁶ and a filmography. If Lewis proved less than forthcoming about his 'personality' there is some material about the production of a number of his films. More interesting, however, are the articles on Lewis by Schrader himself, by Thompson and by Robert Mundy. Schrader regards *Gun Crazy* as quite simply 'one of the best American films every made'²⁷ but is unable to offer any explanation for the alleged excellence of the film, in the light of what he clearly considers the relative mediocrity of most of the rest of Lewis' work; indeed, he found his enthusiasm for the quality of the director decreasing in direct proportion to the quantity of his films viewed. Predictably, Schrader compares *The Big Combo* negatively to Lang's *The Big Heat* and adds that Lewis' only other strong film, *Undercover Man*, pales beside Mann's *T Men*. Mundy is more generous, though his conclusion that 'Lewis' work presents a problem of classification... To look at his work in genres is of little... use'²⁸ is ultimately unhelpful. Richard Thompson's rather longer consideration is less cautious, arguing that, the early work apart,

Lewis found his metier, if not his personal vision, in the new popularity of the film noir. From Julia Ross on, all his successful films were either outright films noirs (Gun Crazy, Undercover Man, Big Combo, Lady without Passport) or contained maudit elements (Desperate Search, So Dark the Night, Cry of the Hunted, A Lawless Street, Halliday

Brand, Terror in a Texas Town). Upon these films – of varying quality, but none without interest – Lewis' reputation rests. Though it seems difficult to claim for Lewis a consistently black vision, his visual style contained several elements conducive to the genre: a taste for Bazinian depth of focus; and for its temporal twin the long take; for camera movement (relativity) rather than alternating static cuts (isolated specificity); for cinematographers with dramatic, concrete styles, often harshly black and white; for naturalistic location shooting, or failing that, for modestly scaled back-lot work stressing character/environment interfaces rather than explicit spectacle.²⁹

Lewis didn't rate an entry in the 1972 *International Encyclopaedia of Film* but in 1974 Tom Flinn's article 'The Big Heat and The Big Combo' appeared in *Velvet Light Trap*'s special issue on the 1950s, and was entirely devoted to a textual and 'political' comparison between the two oft-compared films.³⁰ The same year, the first lengthy appreciation of Lewis, retaining Sarris' 'insanity clause' appeared, 'Joseph H Lewis: Tourist in the Asylum'.³¹ In 1975 a second interview with Lewis, this time by another American critic, Gerald Peary, appeared in the French magazine *Positif*³²; as if to outdo *Cinema*, *Positif* provided seventeen pages for several critics to consider Lewis but once again, the interview elicited little more than the few already familiar anecdotes, some additional production details, while the articles reprised the assertions about Lewis' alleged affinity for *film noir*.

In 1980 Lewis' status for 'cinephiliacs' rose further still. The BFI's *Monthly Film Bulletin* ran retrospective reviews of *The Falcon in San Francisco*, *Gun Crazy*, *A Lady without Passport*, *That Gang of Mine*, *Undercover Man*, *The Big Combo*, *The Halliday Brand*, *Retreat*, *Hell!*, and *Terror in a Texas Town* and devoted its back cover to Tim Pulleine's essay on the director.³³ These efforts comprised part of the preparations for the Edinburgh Film Festival Retrospective for which the first draft of this article was written and to which Paul Willemen, Paul Taylor and Richard Combs also contributed.³⁴ Unlike previous retrospectives at Edinburgh, however, there was no tie-in publication from either the Festival itself, the BFI or *Screen*. Nor was the retrospective taken up later in London at the National Film Theatre – though a small season was mounted at a repertory cinema, Riverside Studios, some weeks before the festival.³⁵ More important in the British promotion of Lewis in the early eighties were the reviews run in the London listings magazine, *Time Out*. The magazine then exercised a virtual monopoly on the audiences of the more adventurous repertory/independent exhibitors in the capital and the reviews duly alerted large (new?) audiences to the films. The two films that received caption reviews were, perhaps predictably, *Gun Crazy* and *The Big Combo*, though, rather less conventionally, it was *The Big Combo* which first attracted exhibitor and consequently reviewer attention in this case. It's worth printing the two reviews in full:

Everything you always loved about American 'film noir' in one sensational

²⁷ Schrader in *Cinema*, op cit, p 43.

²⁸ Mundy in *Cinema*, ibid, p 45.

²⁹ Thompson in *Cinema*, ibid, p 46.

³⁰ 'The Big Heat and The Big Combo – Rogue Cops & Mink-Coated Girls' in *The Velvet Light Trap* no 11, pp 23-28.

³¹ Myron Meisel, 'Joseph H Lewis: Tourist in the Asylum' in Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy (eds), *Kings of the Bs*, op cit.

³² *Positif*, op cit, pp 39-55.

³³ Pulleine, op cit.

³⁴ Paul Willemen's and Richard Combs' contributions were printed in the 1980 *Edinburgh Film Festival* brochure. Paul Taylor has written on Lewis in *Time Out*, May 2-8, 1980, p 51 and p 53.

³⁵ See Paul Taylor's remarks, op cit.

³⁶ *Time Out*, March 2-8, 1979, p 43.

³⁷ *Time Out*, September 21-27, 1979, p 49.

³⁸ Willemen in *Framework*, op cit, p 49.

³⁹ *Cinema*, op cit.

movie: Joseph Lewis' *'The Big Combo'* (*Electric*, from Sunday). Police lieutenant Cornel Wilde searches neurotically for evidence to pin on mobster Richard Conte – because he nurses a pathetic crush on his victim's moll Jean Wallace. Along the way, through the night and fog, he clutches at fragmentary clues (a name, a photo), goes to bed with a stripper and lovingly helps her on with her shoes, and suffers torture – by hearing aid. Sent to get him are two thugs (Lee Van Cleef and Earl Holliman), who share not only guns but also beds; their relationship provides the movie with its most tender moment. The pace is brutal, the tone is harsh, the dialogue is cruel. Almost certainly the greatest movie ever made, as heady as amyl nitrate and as compulsive as stamping on insects. (Tony Rayns)³⁶

From its opening moments, it's clear that *'Gun Crazy'* (*Independents: Electric*) is a B-picture classic. Directed by Joseph H Lewis – whose later noir thriller, *'The Big Combo'*, was also recently rediscovered by the *Electric* – it features an amiable but gun-crazy hero who abandons Hometown USA to elope with the (lady) sharpshooter from a travelling circus. Deep in mutual obsession, they run out of money, patience, and time; then take to armed robbery and the road that leads (inevitably) to death. Flatly passionate, never vampish, Peggy Cummins turns in a staggering performance which threatens, singlehanded, to overthrow the cultural and sexual certainties of middle American life. Even, at the very end, this last romantic couple refuse to pay the price of their rebellion: hunted down in a misty, echoing swamp, their tormented faces express only pain and fear, never a trace of guilt or regret. Compulsive genre cinema, wearing its low budget and Freudian motifs with almost equal disdain; it simply knocks spots off senile imitations like *'Bonnie and Clyde'*. (Chris Auty)³⁷

Also in 1980 the American Telluride Film Festival mounted an impressive *film noir* retrospective, which featured the attendance of Lewis himself, who was interviewed at length by Paul Schrader.

Paul Willemen's paper for Edinburgh is the latest piece on Lewis I have been able to trace – though I should repeat that my aim here is not an exhaustive bibliography but rather a schematic scrutiny of that bibliography as part of the case study of attempted 'authorisations'. And Willemen's article neatly opens up (and yet rather peremptorily also simultaneously closes off) that debate, noting that

*Many avowed auteurs in France, the US and Britain have attempted to claim him as an author. All have failed. Not because it would be impossible to construct a thematic coherence covering a substantial proportion of his work, but because the films appear to resist such efforts, locating their pleasure elsewhere, on a more disturbing though fascinating level.*³⁸

But is it indeed possible to construct such a coherence? Mundy proposes some potential significance in the recurrence of swamp scenes, the predilection for long takes, tracking shots and depth of focus, and a thematic concern for memory and its loss.³⁹ Thompson underlines Lewis' liaison with *film noir* and further notes that 'Lewis seems instinctively to cast his films in the form of hunter-hunted chases' but concludes that 'no consistent style of mise-en-scene is apparent, no Lewis look or Lewis

POV or Lewis conceptual slant that can be spotted from film to film.⁴⁰ Meisel reiterates the hunter-hunted motif and adds another recurrent item of Lewisiana in 'the inseparability of individual identity from social action'. He notes an irreconcilable collision between 'the noir determinism of his style' and 'his brief for family ties as the root of moral responsibility'. Meisel goes on to unpack this assertion a little, describing how Lewis' apparent penchant for 'characters (who) express themselves exclusively through their actions' makes for what he calls 'good visceral cinema'.⁴¹ The former emphasis, on family ties, is repeated by Pulleine; the latter is reprised in Tom Milne's remarks on Godard's debts to Lewis.⁴²

More generally, however, all the critics surveyed seem to agree: that Lewis' films are often stronger in parts than as wholes, as is Lewis' *oeuvre* itself; that the B *film noir* provides a useful way into understanding Lewis, if only so as to distinguish his films that fall outside its parameters; that his stylistic 'signature', however difficult to determine, did preempt some of the attributed innovations of the *nouvelle vague* and yet at the same time functioned as a symptom of and a valediction for a certain sort of American cinema. Finally, there seems to be a critical consensus that Lewis was unwilling and/or unable to 'impose' his personality on his films, but that

*Picking through Lewis' diverse filmography, it is quite easy to find evidence of a director with a strong personality – and just as much evidence of one who never really found a subject. Lewis might almost embody the kind of caricatured figure that an auteurist critic would hold up as the epitome of the cult of the director: stylistic authority operating in a vacuum.*⁴³

Lewis clearly poses a problem for auteurism – as for genre criticism – acknowledged by almost all who have written seriously about his work (with the possible exception of Paul Willemsen). But such problems do little to deter the desperate search of anachronistic auteurists, the cry of the hunters. Trying to identify a coherent, consistent 'thematic core' in the Lewis *oeuvre*, of course, begs the too rarely raised question of just what constitutes such an *oeuvre*, such a core. This article has attempted to argue that neither are static but rather that both are conjunctural and are continuously being reconstructed. Nevertheless, its interesting to note that the film which 'made Lewis' name', in the industry, at least, *My Name is Julia Ross*, should have made the memorisation of a name, an identity, so central to its plot and, indeed, its title. Apparently Lewis chose this project for himself – in fact it seems to have been the first occasion on which he was able to select a script rather than simply being himself selected to direct one. And Lewis himself changed the title from the script's *Woman in Red*. So *Dark the Night* retains the identity/memory thematic (and was also a project selected by Lewis himself). While it may be dubious at best to make much more of this than ironic coincidence, it is worth adding that several of Lewis' films carry this idea, from the undercover identities of the detectives in *A Lady without Passport* and

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Meisel, *op cit.*

⁴² Milne, *op cit.*

⁴³ Richard Combs' review of *Undercover Man* appeared in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, *op cit.*, p 58.

⁴⁴ Reprinted in *Screen Reader 1*, SEFT, London, 1977. I am referring here to Comolli and Narboni's notorious category 'e'.

⁴⁵ Willemen, *Framework*, op cit, p 50.

Undercover Man to the uncovered identities of the mysterious Alicia in *The Big Combo* and the fleeing Bart named by the press in *Gun Crazy*. More intriguingly, perhaps, two more films express the urgency of names and naming in their very titles, *A Lady without Passport* and *The Halliday Brand*.

It's tempting to reject Willemen's remarks about Lewis' films – 'the scripts are unchallenging, the acting stereotyped and haphazard, the ideologies unfailingly reactionary' – as no more than impassioned polemic against auteurist excesses. But the films are worth defending against such charges; not because of any disservice such remarks may do to Lewis or his films but because of their disservice to film history and film studies. Certainly several of the scripts as well as the actors Lewis worked with were imperfect; equally certainly, however, the scripts for *My Name Is Julia Ross*, *A Lady without Passport*, *The Undercover Man*, *Gun Crazy*, *The Big Combo* and *The Halliday Brand* were actually excellent as were many of the performances in Lewis' films and, as a number of critics have suggested, it was Lewis who failed to match them. More seriously, Willemen's allegation that Lewis' films embraced unfailingly reactionary ideologies, its impact as polemic apart, risks returning film studies to the prestigious theatrical values of pre-auteurist days, long before the publication of Comolli and Narboni's influential essay, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism'.⁴⁴ Of all Lewis' work in the period, only *Retreat, Hell!* seems to have had an indisputably propagandist project; and in Hollywood, as elsewhere, it is essential to be wary of intentions. Labelling the entire Lewis *oeuvre* as reactionary seems at best impulsive and at worst critically reactionary itself. Indeed, Willeman could be accused of echoing the Korean War utterance (of General Smith) which gave Lewis' film its name: 'Retreat, Hell! We're just attacking in a different direction.' The 'different direction' in which Willemen is in danger of advancing film theory is toward Adorno and (High) Cultural pessimism and away from the kind of acknowledgement of the films' historical context, their institutional place that this article has been urging as a necessary precondition of any analysis – let alone evaluation – of cinema, from levels of writing or acting to ideology.

For Willemen, however, the present status and historical locus of Lewis' work is simply to be regretted:

*When cinephilia disappears, Lewis' films will cease to have any function, their specificity will vanish along with the spectator's inability to acknowledge a desire for cinema, the asocial, politically irresponsible joy of looking.*⁴⁵

It is hard to take this kind of combination of cultural pessimism and radical puritanism seriously as polemic, let alone as prophecy. But if Lewis' films have had a 'political' role in the last three decades, then that has been their function as hiccups, indigestible exceptions to theories about the general applicability of certain propositions about Hollywood as industry and as cinema, about genre, about the classic realist text, about authorship itself, about the impossibility of attributing essential

'idéologies' to texts outside of their institutional site and historical moment; about specifically the history of Hollywood's modes of production and their relation to modes of representation/signification. That mode of production actively prohibited and delimited the possibilities of individual authorship. But the moment and specific site of such productions as Lewis' between 1945 and 1960 also importantly coincides with another political determinant on Hollywood, that of the HUAC hearings and the consequent blacklist. The blacklist made all too literal the cliché about the authorless anonymity of the average Hollywood film. After the first HUAC hearing (in 1947) and particularly after the first trials (in 1951) a number of film-makers were forced to work anonymously either for the Bs or for the new independents. Victor Navasky's *Naming Names*, a study of the blacklist era, comments:

*Independent filmmakers . . . were by definition antagonistic to studio values. Some were independents because they were incapable of functioning other than on the margin (and on the cheap). And it seems fitting that one of these, the King brothers, should have made it a regular practice to employ black-listed personnel under pseudonyms – not as a protest against repression but as a calculated risk, a shrewd economy, getting top talent for minimal money. It was the King brothers who hired Dalton Trumbo.*⁴⁶

Trumbo's first script for the Kings was apparently *Gun Crazy*. Lewis admits that the MacKinlay Kantor script was far too long; he does not, however, admit that the crediting of Millard Kaufman as co-screen-writer was simply a 'front' for the 'unemployable', blacklisted Trumbo.⁴⁷ Lewis had collaborated with people on the liberal left at Columbia in the late forties. In 1958 he was to be associated even more strongly with blacklistees. The script for his last film, *Terror in a Texas Town*, is attributed on the films credits to Ben L Perry. Lewis notes in his interview with Bogdanovich that Ned Young, a blacklisted writer who also appears in the film, contributed to the script uncredited. So, according to Navasky, did another eminent blacklistee, John Howard Lawson.⁴⁸ In this light, the film's gunfight between (HUAC friendly witness) Sterling Hayden and (the blacklisted) Young takes on new charges.

To paraphrase Buscombe's formulation about Walsh and Warners, it has been the ambition of this piece to call into question the predictable – if problematic – promotion of Lewis to the auteur pantheon; to recognise that working in an industrially defined sub-genre with as distinctive a strategy and style as the B *film noir* imposed a number of constraints on 'creativity' but to insist that such constraints should not be seen as merely negative in their operation. Working in the area of the B *film noir* meant simply that the opportunities for commercial and critical success lay in certain (industrial, generic) directions rather than in others. Sheila Johnson, in an article on the production context of the New German Cinema, has argued

⁴⁶ Victor S Navasky, *Naming Names*, Penguin, 1981, p 155.

⁴⁷ 'Ghostwriting – Unraveling the Enigma of Movie Authorship' by Michael Sragow, *Film Comment* March/April 1983, vol 19 no 2, p 9.

⁴⁸ Navasky op cit, p 345.

⁴⁹ Sheila Johnstone, 'The Author as Public Institution', *Screen Education* nos 32/33 Autumn/Winter 1979/80, p 68.



Not just that some highly individualistic West German films in the sixties and seventies seem to invite an auteurist reading, but that the conditions for an Autor cinema were deliberately cultivated (in conjunction with certain industrial, political and cultural developments) rather than accidentally propitious.⁴⁹

Were Johnston's observations about German art cinema extended to Hollywood, they would go some way to meeting Caughie's suggested relation of 'the author... to institutional and commercial contexts'.⁵⁰ Indeed, I would like to suggest, by way of a conclusion, that the late forties and early fifties in Hollywood, particularly in the competitive realm of the ambitious B/nervous A picture, provided similarly decisive developments, developments which at least partially encouraged the authorial hallmarking and, indeed, the directorial 'expressiveness' of people like Lewis. Countless critics have remarked on the richness of *film noir*, the number of familiar and unfamiliar film-makers who excelled themselves in the genre. Perhaps that genre, though never named as such at the time, was an accidentally propitious arena in which the process of 'authorisation' could be played out and institutionally inscribed. In the 1970s and '80s, on the other hand, *film noir* in general and the B *film noir* in particular have indeed been deliberately recultivated around a number of names – names like Karlson, Fuller, Siodmak, Mann, Tourneur and Ulmer. Among them that of Joseph H Lewis has functioned to literally re-authorise and consequently categorise a number of B *films noirs* in this period just as, in the '40s and '50s, that subgenre itself could be said to have helped to authorise Lewis.



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INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS COLLECTIVISM

JANET STAIGER RECONSIDERS THE SHIFT TO INDEPENDENT PRODUCTION IN THE US FILM INDUSTRY

WHEN HISTORIANS SPEAK of the structure of the United States film industry after World War II, they describe it as a period of the ending of mass production of films and the diffusion of independent production. Following the detailed and influential study by Michael Conant of the 1948 Paramount case,¹ scholars generally assume that the decree allowed independent film-making to flourish and eventually to dominate the industrial structure. I would propose, however, that the 1948 consent decree was only one factor, and merely a reinforcing one, in a general transition away from a regular output and mass production of films to fewer releases and higher-priced product.

From the late 1920s, studios sought to avoid stereotypical product by changing the method of top management of the mass production of films and by giving some workers greater control over special projects. This was symptomatic of an *ideology* that greater control of a film by specialists and talented individuals would produce more variety (of a certain kind) in the films. In the early 1940s, *economic* incentives enhanced the changeover to independent production. These incentives included the elimination by a 1940 consent decree of blind selling and block booking, certain effects of World War II, and an apparent tax advantage. After the war, the movement intensified because of income losses, the divorcement decree, and new distribution strategies. Furthermore, although we might term the new industrial structure 'independent', as it was eventually organised, it retained much of the earlier (studio) mode of production: work was still highly divided and in a structural hierarchy and financing was still determined by the same factors (e.g., a particular narrative form, stars, a proven director, and a good distribution contract). Although there has been a transformation in the industrial structure and mode of production, it is important to note what has been retained from the earlier systems.

The definition of US commercial independent production has not been based on its organisation of the mode of production: in fact, an independent firm could use any of several systems of production. Firms such as David O Selznick's, Samuel Goldwyn's, and Charles Chaplin's, as well as lesser known independents, had work structures much like the major studios: a producer or director topped a hierarchy of labourers. These subordinate workers were positioned within a divided labour structure.² Instead, an independent production firm has been defined as

¹ Michael Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry; Economic and Legal Analysis*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1960. As an example of recent adherence to that position, see Chris Hugo, 'The Economic Background,' *Movie* 27/28, Winter 1980/Summer 1981, p 46.

² For a detailed analysis of the Hollywood system of labour, see Janet Staiger, *The Hollywood Mode of Production: The Construction of Divided Labour in the Film Industry* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1981).

³ 'Outside Producers for Warners: 11 'Names' in New Studio Jobs,'

a company which was not owned by, or did not own, a distribution organisation.

Commercial independent production has always been part of the industrial structure in the United States. In fact, the producers which distributed through United Artists in the 1930s had an excellent record of box office successes. Furthermore, during that period, some major studios such as Paramount, RKO, and Columbia invited independent deals. In the late 1930s, Universal added such arrangements, and in early 1940 Warner Brothers did too, setting up one with Frank Capra and Robert Riskin to make *Meet John Doe*. Even tacitly, all the studios supported some independent work. MGM distributed (on quite profitable terms) Selznick's *Gone with the Wind* (1939). United Artists' producers organised one project (*So Ends the Night*, 1941) in which they bought the story from MGM, borrowed a MGM-contract cinematographer, and rented space from Universal.³

In the early 1930s, the management organisation in the major studios changed. Rather than one central producer supervising 30 to 50 films per year, a group of associate producers each specialised in particular types of films and managed only six to eight films. The proponents of the change argued that the new management system would improve the quality of the product. The industry believed that certain workers concentrating on fewer and special films produced greater economic returns than the mass production of the firm's entire product.⁴ This attitude – itself an ideological position about artistic creation – continued through the 1930s. In 1939, William de Mille wrote: 'Today two conflicting theories of picture-making are struggling to determine which one shall control the future system of production; they are individualism and collectivism.' Others agreed. In the House of Representatives hearings of 1940, Capra and Leo McCarey claimed that they and others had increased freedom in decision-making. George Stevens, representing the Screen Directors Guild, attributed this trend to the firms' wanting pictures with 'the most box office'.⁵

If 'individualism' was viewed as potentially a more profitable system, what held the industry in check from an outright changeover to it? The affiliated majors (those that were fully integrated, owning theatre chains) were still tied to a release-schedule to supply their own houses. For them, a regular output and mass production were necessary. Columbia and Universal, although without the burden of self-generated demand, had weaker product. These companies had found their place in the market by supplying cheaply produced 'B' films, more efficiently made in a mass production set-up. As a result, none of these industry leaders saw a profit advantage in abandoning mass production.

Early Economic Incentives for Independent Production

A major incentive to move away from mass production developed indirectly out of a 1940 consent decree in the federal government's anti-

Motion Picture Herald (hereafter MPH) 138, no 6 (February 10, 1940), p 60; Albert Lewin, '“Peccavi!” The True Confession of a Movie Producer,' *Theatre Arts* September 1941, reprinted in Richard Koszarski (ed), *Hollywood Directors 1941-1976*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp 26-34.

⁴ Staiger, *The Hollywood Mode of Production*, pp 268-72; Janet Staiger, 'Crafting Hollywood Films: The Impact of a Concept of Film Practice on a Mode of Production', paper presented at the Society of Cinema Studies Conference, Los Angeles, California, June 28-July 1, 1982.

⁵ William C de Mille, *Hollywood Saga*, New York, E P Dutton & Co, 1939, p 310; US Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, House, 'Motion-Picture Films (Compulsory Block-Booking and Blind Selling)', hearing on S 280, 76th Cong., 3rd sess., May 13-June 4, 1940, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1940, p 637.

⁶ The vote in the Senate on S 280 (1940) was yeas, 46; nays, 28; not voting, 22; *U S Congressional Record*, 76th Cong., 1st sess., Washington, D C, Government Printing Office, 1939-1940, pp 9247-48. U S Interstate Commerce Committee, Senate, 'To Prohibit and to Prevent Trade Practices known as Compulsory Block-booking and Blind selling in Leasing of Motion-Picture Films in Interstate and Foreign Commerce', report to accompany S 3012, 74th Cong., 2nd sess., Washington, D C, Government Printing Office, June 15, 1936, p 1; US Interstate Commerce Committee, Senate, 'To Prohibit and Prevent Trade Practices Known as Compulsory Block Booking and Blind Selling in Leasing of Motion-Picture Films in Interstate and Foreign Commerce', report to accompany S 153, 75th Cong., 3rd sess., Washington, D C Government Printing Office, February 16, 1938, p 5.

⁷ Good summaries of the events surrounding *United States v Paramount, et al*,

trust suits against the majors. The state had been involved in the industry from film's beginning: censorship, taxes, regulation of exhibition sites, labour acts and rulings, suits to investigate and prevent pools and monopolies. By the mid-1930s, public pressure groups for federal censorship of films had allied with independent theatre exhibitors to fight blind selling and block booking. The pressure groups argued that these trade practices forced independent exhibitors to show undesirable films. In a typical instance, the Senate Committee report on bill S 3012 (1936) recommending its passage claimed that one of the bill's purposes was to 'establish community freedom in the selection of motion-picture films'. Among other proposals, these bills included provisions to require the release of a 'complete and true synopsis of each picture' prior to exhibitor leasing and to prohibit films booked in groups. The majors successfully fought off each of these bills, although votes in Congress indicated strong sentiment to move in that direction; the 1940 Senate vote went in favour of the latest bill.⁶

Two years earlier, the antitrust division of the Department of Justice filed charges against the majors. While the entire history of such suits is important to the structure of the industry, here we are interested primarily in the effect of that suit. After a two-day opening session in June 1940, the trial recessed while the participants wrote a consent decree for the affiliated majors. The agreed-upon decree eliminated blind selling by requiring trade shows of the films and prevented block booking in groups larger than five films. The decree was to remain in effect until 1943 or until June 1942 if the 'little three' (Columbia, Universal, and United Artists) did not sign it.⁷

According to the *Motion Picture Herald*, the early effect of the new trade practices was to place more value on talent and spectacle, with each company loading up every film to try to make all blocks-of-five attractive.⁸ This made economic sense. If motion pictures were now to be sold in groups of five rather than a large block of 30 or more, filling more films with A or Super-A production values became more necessary for competitive reasons. Differentiation—always a primary element in the economic system—intensified. Stars, directors, and stories became even more important ingredients in the product while selling by brand name decreased in value since the entire output of a firm was no longer a marketing point. This placed top talent in even more demand, allowing them greater bargaining power for contracts that included higher salaries and more desirable working conditions—and, in some instances, more production independence.

In addition, the average cost-per-film already seemed to be the best predictor of the box office success of a firm's product: concentrating on fewer, higher-priced films rather than spreading costs across a larger number of motion pictures augured greater profits. This was particularly pertinent once exhibitors could pick and choose their favourite blocks-of-five. Moreover, with implicit collusion between the affiliated companies, these integrated firms could fill each other's theatre chains with the top product, skimming off the cream (and some of the milk) of the earnings.

Even when the 'little three' did not sign the decree in 1942, ending its validity, the firms did not uniformly return to the prior practices. Perhaps the firms anticipated further attacks from government, pressure groups and exhibitors; perhaps they also realised that limiting output had economic advantages. Paramount, RKO, and Twentieth Century-Fox stayed with blocks of five, MGM went up to ten films per block, Columbia and Universal (with the weakest product) went back to the full-season block, while Warners (like United Artists) used unit sales. Thus, the move to fewer, higher-cost films was encouraged.⁹

Another incentive to move away from mass production developed out of the effects of World War II. During the war, theatres experienced increased attendance, with many people having more disposable income and fewer things on which to spend it. Not only did admissions rise, but 'top budget' films commanded longer runs while Bs played out more quickly.¹⁰ *American Cinematographer* noted in June 1943 that the next production season portended fewer films, higher budgets, and longer shooting times because all films were making money: '... productions given the extra time and money which make them more than just ordinarily adequate ones can command sufficient additional playing time in the theatres so that a comparatively few genuine "A's" can earn a larger total profit than the conventional program of a few "A's" and a larger number of cheaper "B's".'¹¹ Monogram announced that month a 'new policy of fewer and higher-budgeted films', including an A starring Jackie Cooper with Sam Levene.¹²

In early 1945 another effect of the war forced the industry into fewer releases. War demands produced a shortage of raw film stock, and distributors were required to limit the number of exhibition prints. Although the major studios had a backlog of negatives, fewer films were released until positive film stock was more available.

That the overall number of films released by the majors declined during and after the war years is evident from US government statistics.¹³ The following is a Congressional count of features released in the 1937-55 period by Columbia, MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century-Fox, United Artists, Universal, and Warner Bros:

1937	408	1944	262	1950	263
1938	362	1945	270	1951	320
1939	388	1946	252	1952	278
1940	363	1947	249	1953	301
1941	379	1948	248	1954	225
1942	358	1949	234	1955	215
1943	289				

are in Ernest Borneman, 'United States versus Hollywood: The Case Study of an Antitrust Suit', in *The American Film Industry*, Tino Balio (ed), Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, pp 332-45; Raymond Moley, *The Hays Office*, Indianapolis, Indiana, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1945, pp. 206-12; U S Select Committee on Small Business, Senate, 'Motion-Picture Distribution Trade Practices, 1956', report, July 27, 1956, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1956, pp 5-6; Conant, *Antitrust*.

⁸ 'Hollywood Places Greater Value on Stars in Blocks-of-5 Selling', *MPH*, 142, no 9, March 1, 1941, p 12.

⁹ 'Mandatory Block-of-Five Sales End for 5 Majors', *MPH*, 148, no 10, September 5, 1942, p 17; 'Majors To Sell In Blocks With Decree Big "If"', *MPH*, 151, no 11 June 12, 1943, pp 17-8.

¹⁰ The *Motion Picture Herald* attributed the A pictures' popularity to heavier advertising and exploitation. This was due to

new trade practices, a result of the 1940 decree. 'Hollywood in Uniform', *Fortune*, 25, April 1942, pp 92-5; 'Playdates On Top Films Increase 30 Per Cent', *MPH*, 151, no 12, June 19, 1943, p 14.

¹¹ 'Through the Editor's Finder', *American Cinematographer*, (hereafter *AC*), 24, no 6, June 1943, p 213.

¹² 'Monogram to Offer 40 for 1943-44', *MPH*, 151, no 12, June 19, 1943, p 40.

¹³ U S Select Committee on Small Business, 'Motion-picture Distribution Trade Practices, 1956', report, p 38.

¹⁴ 'War Booming Market for Independent Product', *MPH*, 153, no 7, November 13, 1943, p 14.

¹⁵ 'Cagney, U A in Five-Year Pact', *MPH*, 152, no 12, September 18, 1943, p 44; 'Wallis Sets Five Year Paramount Production Deal', *MPH*, 155, no 9, May 27, 1944, p 36.

¹⁶ 'Hal Wallis Starts Picture for Paramount Release', *MPH*,

Into this gap between the current and former product-supply levels stepped independents.

In 1943, as the first wave of wartime consumption patterns became apparent, signs of a resurgence of financing for independent projects developed. The *Motion Picture Herald* explained: 'The nation's box office performance of the past two years, resulting from the public's increased income and greater ability to spend money on entertainment and amusement outlets has made it possible to obtain financial support. As one producer put it, "Not since the golden days of the '20s has film money on Wall Street been so free."' ¹⁴ Cagney Productions signed a five-year agreement with United Artists to deliver up to fifteen films, with at least five starring James Cagney. Hal Wallis and Joseph Hazen left Warner Brothers, formed Hal Wallis Productions, and contracted with Paramount to deliver two films a year for five years. Paramount bought a partnership in the firm. ¹⁵

By early 1945, other workers were leaving studio-contract employment to participate in partnerships or profit-sharing. Frank Borzage completed a deal with Republic in which he would 'join that studio as a producer-director with his own unit. Borzage will have all authority over selection of stories and casts and purchases of his own vehicles, as well as a financial interest in them.' Sam Jaffe and Lloyd Bacon, who had already independently produced *The Sullivans* (1944) for Twentieth Century-Fox release, formed a firm to make *Glittering Hill*—distribution was undetermined. Walter Wanger and Fritz Lang organised New World Properties and planned their first film *Scarlet Street* (1945); Universal was to release. With two others, Lewis Milestone started Superior Pictures in order to buy *A Walk in the Sun* (1945) which he had produced and directed for Samuel Bronston's Comstock Productions. ¹⁶

At the conclusion of the war, talents who left the major studios for independent projects included Constance Bennett, Benedict Bogeauss, Capra, Gary Cooper, Lester Cowan, Bing Crosby, Joan Fontaine, John Garfield, Paulette Goddard, Bob Hope, Hedy Lamarr, Fred MacMurray, Pat O'Brien, Ginger Rogers, Stevens, Hunt Stromberg, John Wayne, and Sam Wood. Producers fostered 'de-centralisation of studio control' and gave 'semi-independent status' to some workers—at Paramount to Cecil B De Mille, Wallis, Bill Pine and Bill Thomas; at Warner Brothers to Bette Davis and Errol Flynn; at RKO to Dudley Nichols and McCarey; at Universal to Mervyn Le Roy and Mark Hellinger. ¹⁷

Already a number of methods of financing and distributing independent work were in operation. Some firms held long-term contracts; others found distribution upon completion of the film. Some firms were financed by banks or private investors; others were supported either partially or wholly by the major companies. As noted, with every film likely to be a success and with financing readily available, moving into independent production tempted many workers.

An additional incentive to move to independent production was a peculiar tax situation of which some firms started taking advantage. During

the war, income taxes increased for higher-salaried workers, but capital gains taxes lagged in comparison: 'Under the present United States system [1947] personal incomes are taxable up to 90 per cent on every dollar. But those who forego stipulated salaries for profit-participation in individual corporation ventures can list their assets as capital gains, which are taxable only up to 25 per cent.'¹⁸

The next move is particularly significant: the one-film deal. One analyst pointed out why that type of independent company seemed very advantageous for a while. Investors would set up a corporation for a one-film venture, purchase stock, make the film, and then sell the stock to underwriters or distributors. Only capital gains taxes were paid and the earnings were immediately available for further speculation. In August 1946, the Bureau of Internal Revenue clamped down on this, demanding payments based on ordinary tax rates retroactive to July 1943. Samuel Goldwyn was informed that five of his 'single picture corporations' were subject to this ruling, and United Artists announced that all 35 of its films released since July 1943 had been financed this way. The Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers (SIMPP), a trade association formed by independents in January 1942, reported however that 'not many' independents would be affected. While taking advantage of the tax disparity, most independents had incorporated with the intention of taking only some profits out for personal use and retaining most earnings in the firm to continue production.¹⁹

Thus, by the end of the war, several economic incentives (the 1940 consent decree, the effects of the war, and tax laws) were moving the industry from mass production to fewer, higher-priced, longer-running films, and independent productions released through the majors increased. In addition, the concept of 'individualism' supported this. Although still a minor practice, independent deals spread. At the end of 1946 as the country returned to peacetime, every major firm except MGM had some independent projects as part of its regular production schedule.²⁰

Later Incentives to Continue the Trend

The unique situation of World War II, particularly increased attendance, raw film shortages, and tax laws, requires that we consider the post-war context. Once war conditions ceased, why not return to mass production? What happened after the war, however, intensified the movement toward fewer, selectively-produced films.

Significantly income losses provided a powerful incentive to continue. Descriptions and explanations of the losses are plentiful. On the domestic scene, attendance declined. In Spring 1947, box office figures indi-

158, no 6, February 10, 1945, p 41; 'Seven Films Are Started; 49 Now in Production', *MPH*, 158, no 9, March 3, 1945, p 33; 'Four Pictures Are Started As Strike Hampers Work', *MPH*, 158, no 13, March 31, 1945, p 45; "'They Were Expendable" Begins Rolling at MGM', *MPH*, 158, no 10, March 10, 1945, p 38.

¹⁷ Ernest Borneman, 'Rebellion in Hollywood: A Study in Motion Picture Finance', *Harper's*, 193, October, 1946, pp 337-43; Frederic Marlowe, 'The Rise of the Independents in Hollywood', *Penguin Film Review*, no 3, August 1947, p 72; 'Review of the Film News', *AC*, 26, no 10, October 1945, p 33; Frank Capra, 'Breaking Hollywood's "Pattern of Sameness"' in *Hollywood Directors*, Koszarski (ed), pp 83-9; 'Paramount: Oscar for Profits', *Fortune*, 35, no 6, June 1947, pp 90-5, 208-21; '42 Pictures Are Shooting: "Junior Miss" Started', *MPH*, 158, no 7, February 17, 1945, 29; 'Talent Planning to Fight Capital Gains Tax Ruling', *MPH*, 164, no 5, August 3, 1946, p 73.

¹⁸ Marlowe, 'The Rise of the Independents in Hollywood', p 72. Also-see U S Select Committee on Small Business, 'Motion-Picture Distribution Trade Practices, 1956', hearings, 84th Cong., 2nd sess, March 21-May 22, 1956, Washington, D C, Government Printing Office, 1956, pp 349-50.

¹⁹ Although threatening to fight the ruling, the offending companies eventually settled with the Bureau. Borneman, 'Rebellion in Hollywood', pp 337-43; 'No Personal Films', *MPH*, 164, no 4, July 27, 1946, 9; 'Talent Planning to Fight Capital Gains Tax Ruling', *MPH*, 164, no 5, August 3, 1946, p 43; 'Capital Gains Net Terms to Radio and Stage', *MPH*, 164, no 6, August 10, 1946, p 21; 'Tax Benefit Units on Coast Settle Revenue Claims', *MPH*, 171, no 3, April 17, 1948, p 14.

²⁰ See, for instance, the lists of films starting in production in the *Motion Picture Herald* for December 1946 and January 1947.

cated a resumption of more normal consumption patterns as higher costs of living developed. Although 'outstanding films' still drew customers, the average film was not doing well. Universal chairman of the board Cheever Cowdin announced his firm had turned entirely to A product and warned that all costs would have to be watched. On the foreign scene, European countries moved to restrict exportation of earnings. On August 8, 1947, the US ceased exporting films to Britain in response to Britain's 75 per cent *ad valorem* tax. Five weeks later, statistics indicated that over the last year as a result of both income problems, studio employment of workers had decreased 30 per cent. The number of films shooting likewise declined.²¹

The response by the companies to these losses was typical. The firms reduced short-term costs (costumes, sets, story purchases) and fixed liabilities – particularly term contracts with labourers. Between June 1945 and August 1948 the number of writers on term contracts fell from 189 to 87; contracts for members of the Screen Actors Guild declined from 742 in February 1947 to 463 in February 1948; the number of employed skilled and unskilled workers also moved from a peak of 22,100 in 1946 to 13,400 in 1949.²²

Unions and guilds recognised the threat to their members. The Screen Actors Guild, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, and others constructed a 'separate category' for independent producers with a picture budget of less than 100,000 dollars. Salary scales and the required minimum number of workers on a crew were reduced.²³

By early 1948, location shooting was also being touted as a method for solving these various problems, and this location shooting continued to reduce the formerly central role of the Hollywood studios. *Close-Up*, a Marathon Production for Eagle-Lion release, was made entirely in New York City, including all laboratory work, at '25 per cent' of what it would cost in Hollywood. As its producers admitted, however, this was possible only because the film was part of the new tendency towards 'realism'. At the end of 1949, New York City alone could boast of 35 films made partially or totally in the town over the last two years.²⁴

Location shooting was also promoted as a means to unfreeze revenues in European countries. The deals arranged continued to reinforce one-time only financial agreements. The majors' trade association, the Motion Picture Association of America, announced that 'American producers may liquidate dollars now blocked in at least six foreign countries by producing in or sending pictures on location to Italy, France, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Australia.'²⁵ When Britain and the United States came to terms over the *ad valorem* tax in March 1948, the agreement restricted the number of American craftsmen who could work on US productions in Britain. France's 1948 agreement also stipulated that while American firms could invest up to 50 per cent of the cost of a French-produced film, the technical staff had to be French. Despite that set-back, and with the lure of potentially cheaper labour as well as an answer to their 'quest for realism' and spectacle, firms started shooting parts of their schedules abroad. In mid-1949, MGM announced seven of

its next season's films would have foreign sites in eight countries. Other firms planned locations ranging from Britain, Germany, Italy, and France to the more exotic locales of Tahiti, India, Africa, and Borneo.²⁶

If a post-war return to normal consumption patterns and foreign income losses affected the industry by 1948, by 1950 other domestic factors also led to continued losses: population shifts, changing recreational habits, regional unemployment, and particularly competition with television. After 1950, television's effects became more apparent as the number of sets and broadcast stations rose. A 1950 federal government survey indicated that families with television reduced their movie-theatre attendance by 72 per cent and their children's visits were down 46 per cent. A Congressional Committee reported in 1956 that 'during the first 4 years of television's growth [1948-1952] in those areas where television reception was good, 23 per cent of the theatres closed compared to only 9 per cent of the theatres closing in those areas where television was not available'. By 1953, film companies were considering specific technological strategies to outdo television—3-D, widescreen processes, and stereophonic sound.²⁷

As income losses continued, the advantage of working in separate deals, one at a time, was clear. As a year-end summary in 1948 indicated: 'Producers, more and more, are willing to hire talent as needed and are prepared, if necessary, to pay more rather than maintain expensive stock companies with those inevitable periods of idleness, the cost of which must be spread over the remainder of their annual programs.'²⁸ Not only did the studios eliminate fixed salaries (one of the highest portions of the budget) but the companies' risk was reduced. Either they set up the 'package' themselves or they arranged a deal with an independent firm. Both the elimination of fixed costs and the reduction of their risk were attractive incentives to support a project-by-project system of operation.

Furthermore, another incentive, divorcement of exhibition from production and distribution, eased any pressures to return to mass production. No longer concerned with a regular supply to part of its own firm, a company could concentrate on fewer, specialised projects. Divorcement had been rumoured since 1943. In August 1944, the Department of Justice, unsatisfied with the results of the 1940 consent decree, requested a modification. Asking the district court for divorcement of the exhibition sector from the production-distribution sectors, the Department reopened the antitrust suit. As the case neared its conclusion in 1948, the trade papers reported:

There are heard, for instance, plausible-sounding whispers that the major studios are not going to throw any really big pictures into production until home office executives find out what the Supreme Court is going to decide with reference to divorcement. Local observers summon support for the report by pointing out that all of the major studios have gone more or less

²¹ 'Industry Must Readjust Price and Cost: Cowdin', *MPH*, 168, no 3, July 19, 1947, p 13; 'Pressure Force Issues Down on Stock Market', *MPH*, 169, no 13, December 27, 1947, p 13; William R Weaver, 'Independents Save 20%; Major Studios Stymied', *MPH*, 168, no 11, September 13, 1947, pp 13-4; 'Production Index Still Down; Metro, 20th-Fox, Warner Start "A" Films', *MPH*, 169, no 13, December 27, 1947, p 31.

²² 'Editorial', *The Screen Writer*, 4, no 3, September 1948, p 4; Anthony A P Dawson, 'Hollywood's Labour Troubles', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 1, no 4, July 1948, p 642; William R Weaver, 'Studio Employment—A 12-Year Study', *MPH*, 174, no 6, February 5, 1949, p 15; 'Employment at Studios Hit 13-Year Low in 1949', *MPH*, 178, no 8, February 25, 1950, p 35.

²³ William R Weaver, 'Independents Save 20%; Major Studios Stymied', *MPH*, 168, no 11, September 13, 1947, pp 13-4.

²⁴ William R. Weaver, 'Studios Hold Gains with Six Pictures Starting', *MPH*, 170, no 6, February 7, 1948, p 25; Fred Hift, 'Those Big City Scenes Are Really Shot On the Spot', *MPH*, 177, no 13, December 24, 1949, p 25.

²⁵ 'Hollywood Is Travelling Abroad for Production', *MPH*, 170, no 3, January 17, 1948, p 13.

²⁶ 'British Pact Signed and U S Ready To Deliver', *MPH*, 170, no 12, March 20, 1948, p 13; William R. Weaver, 'Impact of British-U.S. Deal on Production Is Worrying Hollywood', *MPH*, 171, no 7, May 15, 1948, p 27; 'Report 20th-Fox Will Make 12 Top Films in Europe', *MPH*, 172, no 10, September, 1948, p 12; '20th-Fox To Offer 32 In Month-By-Month Schedule', *MPH*, 172, no 12, September 18, 1948, p 17; 'Shoot More Films Abroad', *MPH*, 176, no 4, July 23, 1949, p 16.

²⁷ 'Video Hurts, Survey Says', *MPH*, 178, no 6, February 11, 1950, p 22; U S Select

*extensively into the practice of setting up deals with independent producers. This is readily interpreted as indicating a decision by the majors to place themselves in a position of preparedness to give up production entirely, if that becomes advisable, and convert their studios to the status of rental lots.*²⁹

Although the majors eventually separated the production studios from the theatre chains rather than abandoning production outright, the particular conjuncture of events again added to the overall impetus of the industrial shift.

Smaller firms such as Monogram and Universal had already moved into A production when As started doing so much better than Bs at the box office. With divorcement looming, other minor companies turned in that direction, often through independent deals. Republic released *Spectre of the Rose* (1946, produced by Ben Hecht), *Moonrise* (1948, Borzage), *MacBeth* (1948, Orson Welles), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949, Allan Dwan), *The Red Pony* (1949, Milestone), *Secret Beyond the Door* (1949, Diana Productions), and *Rio Grande* (1950, John Ford).³⁰

A final incentive to move away from mass production also occurred in these post-war years. New distribution strategies played to the highly differentiated film, one which might seek only part of the audience as its clientele. Forerunners of this were Selznick's *Duel in the Sun* (1946) and RKO's release *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946, Goldwyn). *Duel in the Sun* used the tactic of mass openings across the United States (saturation booking) while both firms had 'advanced admissions' – roadshowing at higher admission prices. Encouraged by the results, majors announced their intention to show selected films at advanced prices. Not only were special 'packages' encouraged in this way, but small independents supplanted the second- and third-run theatres, now being neglected by the major distributors.³¹

In addition to aiming films primarily at first-run audiences, the industry witnessed a growth in the art theatre, which also played to a particular clientele. The trade papers speculated in 1947 that the 'art film' surge was due to lack of access to foreign films during the war and to 'the French-culture-conscious "intelligentisia"' as well as the 'G.I.'s whom the war had brought into contact with European languages and customs'.³² With the Audience Research Institute and other such companies now supplying marketing information and audience analyses, it was much more possible to tailor a film for a select group than to aim it at a mass audience. As it became clearer that only certain age- and income-levels consistently attended certain theatres, such specialisation increased.

The move away from mass production, to fewer films, with independents providing a substantial proportion, was gradual. A system which had been so successful for four decades was not readily discarded. Various factors helped ease the shift, however. One of these was the latest expansion of support firms to provide experts and technology as needed. People who had been long-term workers for major studios struck out on their own as the companies cut down the workforce. Linwood Dunn of the famed RKO special effects group and Charles Berry of Universal formed an optical printing firm, and another company built the first new

studio for independents in eighteen years. Other firms moved later into leasing equipment, arguing that rather than using capital to purchase technology, by leasing it, a firm could have the latest equipment without the long-term investment. Certainly, the support-firm supply of state-of-the-art technology, studio space, and technical experts was a long-time characteristic of the industry; firms now recognised they no longer needed a self-contained studio, particularly since they were no longer mass-producing films. Overhead costs were replaced with expenditures for rentals and short-term hiring.³³

Another factor easing the change was a new flexibility in the industry: not only was its means of production being pooled through the speciality and support firms, but the unions acted as coordinators for the supply of skilled labourers. This labour pooling eventually helped its workers make an easy transition into television. In early 1949, actors who had appeared in 'such ambitious showcases as the Ford Theater and the Philco Playhouse' included Paul Muni, Peter Lorre, Fay Emerson, Raymond Massey, Eddie Albert, Boris Karloff, and John Carradine. At the same time, *American Cinematographer* started preparing its photography experts to move into television as theatrical-exhibition film work decreased. Hal Roach Studios picked up *The Trouble with Father* series in 1951; in 1952, fifteen ASC members were shooting for television, including Lucien Andriot on *Rebound* and Karl Freund on *I Love Lucy*. By then, the cinematographers' union was 'hard pressed' to supply camera operators and assistants for all the television work, and throughout the 1950s as film employment slowed down, cinematographers found work readily available in television. With the shift to the unions as the stock pool of labour, putting together a package for either medium was comparable, and the separate media unions combined into unified ones. In 1950, the Society of Motion Picture Engineers added 'Television' to its title; in 1954, the writers for screen, radio, and television combined into the Writers Guild of America; in 1960 the screen directors and the radio and television directors merged into the Directors Guild of America.³⁴

Financing was never simple. Although during the war money had been readily available, with income losses in the late 1940s, independents felt the pinch. In 1949, banks noticeably tightened loan requirements, restimulating other financing tactics. Independent theatre owners formed a company to finance independent projects in the A category; N Peter Rathvon and Floyd Odlum, former RKO executives and owners, organised the Motion Picture Capital Corporation to do likewise. Companies continued to use capital gains tax advantages.³⁵ Finally, one of the solutions which was to become extremely common in later decades was proposed in 1949. Film financier A Pam Blumenthal suggested that independents be financed by the major distributors. As a trade paper explained his 'formula':

Committee on Small Business, 'Motion-Picture Distribution Trade Practices, 1956', report, p 22. This latter source is excellent on the effects of television (see pp 29-31); the analysis includes the argument that drive-ins had a relatively low impact on four-wall exhibition (pp 28-9).

²⁸ Red Kann, 'Hollywood in '49', *MPH*, 174, no 4, January 22, 1 19, p 18.

²⁹ William R Weaver, 'Production Up But Big Pictures Are Held Off', *MPH*, 170, no 11, March 13, 1948, p 35.

³⁰ Lincoln, 'Comeback of the Movies', p 131; Merrill Lynch, *Radio, Television, Motion Pictures*, pp 21, 24; Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy, *Kings of the Bs*, New York, E P Dutton, 1975, p 30.

³¹ 'Six Majors Plan 7 Films Sold At Advanced Prices', *MPH*, 168, no 9, August 30, 1947, p 23.

³² 'Importers Seek Theatre Outlets', *MPH*, 166, no 6, February 8, 1947, p 50.

³³ 'New Special Effects Company Formed', *AC* 28, no 2, February 1947, p 66; 'Motion Picture Center: Hollywood's Newest Studio', *AC*, 28, no 9, September 1947, pp 314-15; John Forbes, 'Want to Expand? Leasing Is the Answer', *AC*, 41, no 2, February 1960, p 100, 116.

³⁴ Fred Hift, 'Coast Talent Poised Over Television Pond', *MPH*, 174, no 9, February 26, 1946, p 19. See *AC* through the 1950s but particularly: Victor Milner, 'A S C Inaugurates Research on Photography for Television', *AC*, 30, no 3, March 1949, pp 86, 100-2; John De Mos, 'The Cinematographer's Place in Television', *AC*, 30, no 3, March 1949, pp 87, 102, 104-5; Walter Streng, 'In the Best Professional Manner', *AC*, 32, no 5, May 1951, pp 186, 200-1; Leigh Allen, 'Television Film Production', *AC*, 33, no 2, February 1952, p 69; Frederick Foster, 'The Big Switch Is To TV!', *AC*, 36, no 1, January 1955, pp 27-7, 38-40; Arthur Miller, 'Hollywood's Cameramen at Work', *AC*, 38, no

*... a major studio can reduce its overhead drastically by releasing substantial numbers of its contract talent to individual producers to whom it first will have supplied financing under terms requiring use of the major studio's facilities and with the product going to the major for release. Talent going to the independent company will be on their own time during pre-production periods, and producers operating on this basis will be on their own responsibility to meet the challenge of the current market.*³⁶

All of these financing strategies were common from the 1950s on.

The initial and later incentives to shift to an industrial structure of independent firms releasing through the majors fostered the development of a system of production in which film projects were set up on a film-by-film arrangement. By 1954, only MGM was still using the formerly-dominant studio system, but in early 1956, the trade papers reported that 'outside deals are being made even by MGM'. While in early 1950 about 25 per cent of the films in production were clearly independent productions (with other films including profit-sharing for certain staff personnel), in early 1956 the figure was about 53 per cent, and in early 1959, it was 70 per cent. Of the 21 top-grossing films in the United States and Canada in 1956, eleven were independently produced. If there was any doubt about the change, the last of the major studio production heads stepped down in 1956: Dore Schary left MGM in December 1956 and Darryl F Zanuck relinquished his position in February of that year to go into independent production, releasing through Twentieth Century-Fox.

By this time as well, film companies had transferred their mass production techniques to television series. By January 1956, Paramount, Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia, Warners, MGM, United Artists, Disney, Allied Artists, and Republic had interests in television. Harold Hecht and Burt Lancaster could celebrate the tenth anniversary of their independent production company in 1957.³⁷ Robert Wise, in looking back over his career, could date 1957 as the last time he had a multiple-film contract: 'All my films—every one since then—have been made as individual projects, even when I stayed at a particular studio for several years... I had chosen to remain completely independent and select my own projects and work my own deals out individually on each one.'³⁸ By the mid-1950s, independent production had become a firm option in the Hollywood mode of production and was dominant by 1960.

In operation, the mode of production for an independent firm differed little from studio production. Middle- and lower-echelon workers were still strictly specialised (a result of unionisation and technological expertise). Only certain top management positions (producers, directors, writers, and actors) had more flexibility than in the earlier Hollywood mode of production. While industry-wide pooling of labour had occurred, work was still divided and structured in a hierarchy. Financing was based on conceptions of what would sell—now more carefully researched but still an effect of a decision to retain profit-making as the controlling goal for the suppliers of capital.³⁹

It is important to understand that the shift from studio mass production to independent, specialised production has not necessarily secured a significant change in the factors which could affect the films produced, distributed and exhibited by the US film industry. In fact, the move to independent production was not 'outside' the dominant sectors of the industry. The major studios supported an ideology of 'individualism' from the late 1920s on. Furthermore, from the early 1940s, the majors judged that concentrating on a smaller number of films per year would be more profitable. In addition, independent production reduced the risks for the majors which began to concentrate their profit-making strategies in the areas of wise investments in 'packages' and in distribution of the finished films. Finally, independent production firms in the Hollywood mainstream retained the essential characteristics of a mode of production which has been considered efficient and economical since the early teens. Thus, overall independent production has reproduced the dominant practices of Hollywood. In the conflict between individualism and collectivism, individualism may seem to have won out, but it is an individualism which retains a great number of the characteristics of its predecessor.

9, September 1957, pp 580-81. Estimates for 1955 were that ten times the work for television companies compared to theatrical exhibition was being done in Hollywood: Morris Gelman, 'The Hollywood Story', *Television Magazine*, 20, September 1963.

³⁵ 'U A to Study Financing of Producers', *MPH*, 174, no 1, January 1, 1949, p 25; Red Kann, 'Hollywood in '49', *MPH*, 174, no 4, January 22, 1949; p 18; William R Weaver, 'Giannini Says Bank's Loans At New Peak', *MPH*, 175, no 12, June 18, 1949, p 23; Red Kann, 'Circuit Owners Form Company to Finance Product', *MPH*, 176, no 1, July 2, 1949, pp 13-4; William R Weaver, 'Partnership Aid

Helps Financing Unit Pay', *MPH*, 176, no 7, August 13, 1949, p 23; J A Otten, 'Tax, Credit and Labor Matters Are On Washington Agenda for 1957', *MPH*, 206, no 1, January 5, 1957, p 21.

³⁶ William R Weaver, 'See Problems Eased by Blumenthal Formula', *MPH*, 174, no 12, March 19, 1949, p 33.

³⁷ Lincoln, 'Comeback of the Movies', p 130;

'Outlook for 1956', *MPH*, 202, no 1, January 7, 1956, p 8; films listed in production for January through March 1950, 1955, and 1959, *Motion Picture Herald*; 'Top Grossing Pictures of 1956', *MPH*, 206, no 1, January 5, 1957, pp 12-3; 'Name Adler to Zanuck Post', *MPH*, 202, no 6, February 11, 1956, p 18; Vincent Canby, 'Hollywood Pushes Into TV Production Arena', *MPH*, 198, no 4, January 22, 1955, p 13; Jay Remer,

'Hollywood Eyes TV As New Production Source', *MPH*, 202, no 2, January 14, 1956, p 12; William R Weaver, 'Hecht-Hill-Lancaster Plan Nine Features', *MPH*, 206, no 1, January 5, 1957, p 20.

³⁸ 'Robert Wise Talks About "The New Hollywood"', *AC*, 57, no 7, July 1976, pp 770-71.

³⁹ Staiger, *The Hollywood Mode of Production*, pp 319-27.

CRITICAL THEORY AND 'BRITISH CINEMA'

ANDREW HIGSON CONSIDERS TWO NEW
STUDIES

¹ See Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios*, Cameron and Tayleur/David and Charles, 1977; Charles Barr, 'Projecting Britain and the British Character: Ealing Studios', Part I *Screen* Spring 1974, vol 15 no 1, pp 87-121, Part II *Screen* Summer 1974, vol 15 no 2, pp 129-163; John Ellis, 'Made In Ealing', *Screen* Spring 1975, vol 16 no 1, pp 78-127.

² See Ian Christie (ed), *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, London, British Film Institute, 1978. And Mary-Lou

HOLLYWOOD, in one form or another, has always dominated conceptions of British cinema. The influence of French critical theory and particularly the work of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and the structuralist debates since the 1950s, have, for perfectly good reasons, focused British film theory on the meanings and pleasures of Hollywood cinema, and its ideological constructions. British cinema, on the other hand, has, until recently, failed to fulfil the cinephiliac desires of serious British film critics. In the last few years, however, the theoretical work developed in relation to Hollywood has enabled a re-thinking of the terrain of British cinema, providing the critic with a new domain of pleasure. Thus there have been studies of the ideological work of Ealing films¹; authorship criticism has found interest in film-makers such as Powell and Pressburger, and Humphrey Jennings²; and it has been argued that Hammer horror films produce pleasures in relation to British cinema akin to those of the Western for Hollywood³.

At the same time, more orthodox film criticism has always found an interest in British cinema – or, to be more precise, a certain conception of 'British cinema', dominated by a realist aesthetic initially articulated, for the feature film, in conjunction with a concern to produce 'quality', 'British' films in the 1940s. It is, in part, the massive dominance of this orthodoxy and its conception of British cinema that has until recently effectively defined British cinema as outside the concerns of the radical film theorist. Now this orthodoxy is being challenged, and alternative

ways of making sense of British cinema are being developed. In particular, the question of how to produce a cinema and film culture independent and distinct from Hollywood can be re-considered: previously, this has too often been thought through in terms of building a 'national cinema', but such a project is always dependent on constructing an imaginary homogeneity of identity and culture and, in relation to cinema, on celebrating and promoting a particular conception of 'British cinema'.

Christian Metz has argued that the institution of cinema consists of three machines: the industrial machinery, the metapsychological machinery of the spectator, and the 'writing' machine, that discourse about cinema which 'vaunts' and 'valorises' films⁴. The dominant discourse of British film criticism 'writes' British cinema into film cultural memory as a realist cinema, thus effectively blocking off other ways of conceptualising the institution, and working through the question of national cinema. It is now necessary to treat this writing machine as an integral part of British cinema as a national institution, in order to see how 'British cinema' becomes constituted as such. The conventional terms can no longer be accepted unproblematically.

It is in this context that two new books on British cinema emerge. Both *British Cinema History*⁵ and *Gainsborough Melodrama*⁶ are edited collections of newly commissioned papers which provide a welcome addition to the growing body of work on British cinema. Both books will be of great interest to the non-specialist reader, as well as to researchers, teachers and students of British cinema, and of other areas such as the melodrama. It is a pity, in this context, that as yet no 16mm prints of Gainsborough melodramas are in distribution.⁷ Similarly, the status of some of the papers in *British Cinema History* raises problems in terms of how they are to be used, and by whom. Thus while it is useful to have such a variety of material gathered together in one volume, much of the general argument is familiar from existing writing on British cinema, while some of the new material is poorly referenced, particularly in the section on the development of the cinema industry. As such, the various surveys will be of more use to those involved in teaching or studying courses on British cinema, than to those involved in research.

British Cinema History is a collection of 19 papers on various aspects of British cinema. The opening section purports to deal with the adequacy of the various existing historical perspectives on British cinema, although it doesn't really come to grips with the issues at stake. The three papers in the second section trace a chronological history of the political economy of the cinema industry, focusing on the developing concentration of capital, the relationships between the domestic industry and American capital and distribution companies, and the policies and practices of the State in relation to the cinema industry. In addition, there is a (limited) re-examination of the familiar argument that the British film industry has structurally never constructed a space for the 'creativity' that might have produced a more consistent and recognisable national cinema. The third section of the book looks at the specific organisation of film production, and questions of creativity and control in the

Jennings (ed),
Humphrey
Jennings: *Film
Maker, Painter,
Poet*, London,
British Film
Institute in assoc.
with Riverside
Studios, 1982.

³ See David Pirie, *A Heritage of Horror, the English Gothic Cinema, 1946-72*, New York, Avon Books, 1973; David Pirie, *Hammer Horror*, British Film Institute Education Teaching pack, 1981.

⁴ Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen* Summer 1975, vol 16 no 2, pp 14-76.

⁵ James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1983. Further page references to this book will be included in the text.

⁶ Sue Aspinall and Robert Murphy (eds), *Gainsborough Melodrama*, London, British Film Institute Dossier 18, 1983. Further page references to this book will be given in the text.

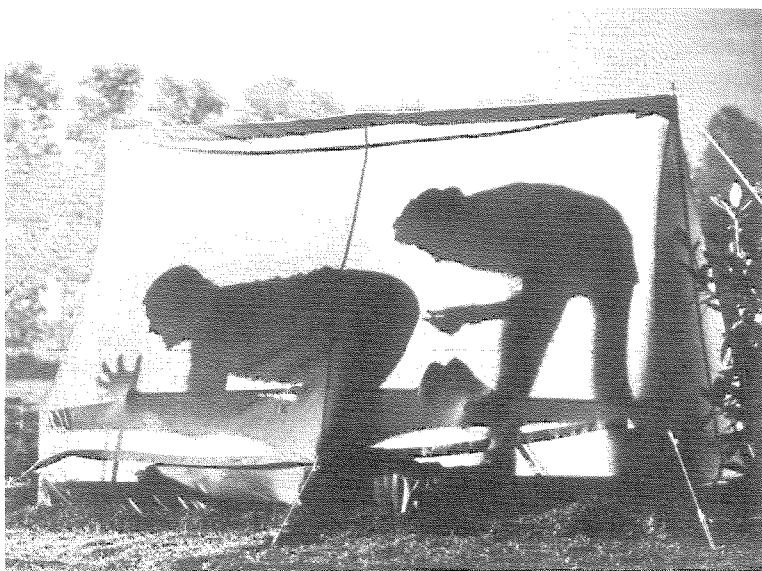
⁷ Although a number of new 35mm prints were struck for the

actual practices of the film-makers. Thus there are chapters on Ealing Studios and Hammer Films, on the production of James Bond films, on various forms of propaganda films, as well as an examination of the ways in which the Rank organisation attempted to break into the American market in the late 1940s. But there are also chapters on the 'official' documentary film movement, and the labour movement films of the 1930s, and on post-war independent cinema. The inclusion of the latter seems initially to be an important step forward in the conceptualisation of the institution of cinema in Britain, but there remain severe problems here which I will return to later. The fourth section of the book deals with the films themselves: the cinema of Empire and 'domestic' films of the 1930s, the representation of women in melodramas of the 1940s, Ealing comedies, the 'New Wave' 'realist' films of the early 1960s, and the 'Carry On' films. The main concern here is with the ways in which films work over contemporary ideological positions and contradictions. Finally, there is a useful statistical survey of the British cinema industry, and an extensive, apparently exhaustive, but in the end strangely incomplete bibliography.

Gainsborough Melodrama is one of the British Film Institute's dossiers which are published alongside seasons of films at the National Film Theatre. Again, it is a valuable collection of material dealing with various facets of the very popular but critically despised melodramas produced at the Gainsborough studios in the 1940s. Pam Cook has produced an excellent survey of existing writing on melodrama, which she then develops in relation to the neglected sub-genre of the women's picture, and specifically Gainsborough's women's pictures, while Sue Aspinall concentrates on the equally neglected costume melodrama. There is also a paper on art direction and costume design, and a paper on the history and organisation of the studio, and its place in the overall structure of the British film industry in the 1940s. Finally, there are a number of interviews with ex-Gainsborough personnel, and an extensive filmography with a selection of fairly full critical comments on each film by contemporary critics and others.

One of the many advantages of *Gainsborough Melodrama* is the way in which it theorises the institution of cinema, such that the authors recognise the need to take into account the role of film criticism – discourse about the cinema – in determining the image which Gainsborough melodramas have in British cinema history. In the context of the dominance of a realist aesthetic in British film criticism, the clear marking of these films as 'fantasy' has rendered them outside the limits of that which is, for the orthodoxy, constituted as 'British cinema'. This despite the fact that the films were very popular with British audiences in the 1940s (in part, as Robert Murphy shows in his contribution to the dossier, due to the industrial and production conditions of the studio and particularly its links with the Rank organisation). This marginalising of popular cultural film forms within British film culture is a not uncommon process, as Marion Jordan's chapter on the 'Carry On' films in *British Cinema History* indicates.⁸

⁸ See also the comments on the horror film in British film culture in Pirie, *op cit.*



A popular film form marginalised within British film culture: *Carry on Camping*.

Gainsborough Melodrama also seeks to explain the existence and popularity of these melodramas not simply in terms of the structure of the British film industry and the organisation of the studio, but also in terms of the ideological, semiotic and psychoanalytical work of the melodrama, and Gainsborough's specific variants of it, for the spectator, and particularly the female spectator. However the implicit theorisation of the institution produced in the range and organisation of material in the dossier is somewhat at odds with the propositions made in the introduction, where it is argued that to make adequate sense of the Gainsborough melodramas, it is necessary

to take into account the historical, political and ideological as well as the economic, industrial and technical determinants of a film text and its effects. (p 2)

The language of 'determinants' and 'effects', with the text as some sort of neutral vehicle caught in between, constructs an essentially sociological model of cinema as a mass medium. In fact, as I have suggested, this language is superseded in the actual body of the dossier. *British Cinema History* on the other hand is almost completely worked out in terms of this particular sociological model. It is not surprising therefore to note that the editors of the Gainsborough dossier both have papers in *British Cinema History*—papers whose terms of debate are clearly fixed by this language of sociology.

A number of recent studies of the mass media⁹ have developed a sociological version of the traditional Marxist model for theorising the relationship between the economic base and the ideological superstructure. A trajectory is established which begins with the 'macro' structures of the media industries, and patterns of ownership and control; the investigation then shifts to an analysis of production contexts which mediate

⁹ See for instance James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Mass Communication and Society*, Edward Arnold with Open University Press, 1977. Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, 'Capitalism, Communication and Class Relations', *ibid*, is the most explicit statement of the position I go on to describe. It might also be noted that James Curran, co-editor of this book, is also co-editor of *British Cinema History*, *op cit*.

¹⁰ See eg Vincent Porter, 'The Context of Creativity', and Sue Aspinall, 'Women, Realism and Reality in British Films, 1943-53'.

¹¹ Notably those on independent cinema (Trevor Ryan, 'The New Road to Progress', and Simon Blanchard and Sylvia Harvey, 'The Post War Independent Cinema') and Janet Woollacott, 'The James Bond Films: Conditions of Production'.

¹² On the difference between history and discourse see Christian Metz, 'History/Discourse: a Note on Two Voyeurisms', in John Caughie (ed), *Theories of Authorship*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul with the British Film Institute, 1981. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, is the most readable account of the theory of cinema which I am proposing here.

the structural, economic 'determinants' which such a model foregrounds. This intermediate stage deals with that institutional space where the tension between 'creativity' and 'control' is resolved in terms of specific production routines and occupational ideologies: a specific organisation of production. This 'micro' structure then provides the immediate context for the production (or 'determination') of texts, in this case films, which are theorised solely in terms of 'content', as ideological *products*. A further branch of this sociology moves on to a second stage where the 'effects' of the 'content' of these 'finished products' upon the audience are constructed.

It is precisely this model which is adopted in *British Cinema History*, and which is evident in the division of the book into discrete sections (structure of the industry/organisation of production/films as ideological products). The implications of this model emerge either explicitly¹⁰ or implicitly in the arguments of a number of chapters. On the other hand a critique of this sociological model begins to emerge in some of the other chapters¹¹, but their very insertion within the organising principles of the book as a whole works against the potential significance and effectivity of such critiques.

One of the major problems with this model is the way in which film texts are theorised. Essentially, as I have indicated, they become products, which, in one way or another, reflect or reproduce the 'dominant ideology' or class interests of the owners of film industry capital. The ideological work of the text is thus fixed prior even to the emergence of the text as such. This form of theory works to reproduce the historicity of the text which the semiotic activity of most mainstream films (including most mainstream British films) produces: that sense invoked in the spectator that, far from being witnesses to the construction of a fiction, and the telling of a story, they are present in a real world of real people and events. The discursivity of the text is thus doubly contained: by the work of the film system itself, and by the sociology of such theory. The text appears only as the (ideological) enounced, and the work of enunciation (the construction of a specific address via point of view, the construction of narrative space via the conventions of continuity editing, the construction of pleasure in the play of repetition and difference and so on) is reduced to essentially economic determinations.¹²

The separation of the institution into discrete objects only serves to reinforce the failure to examine the semiotic productivity of film texts: both the section on structures of ownership and control in the British film industry, and the section on organisation of production, in *British Cinema History*, are forced to resort to the most superficial mentions of films, and the standard of film criticism here is at the level of a journalistic gloss. A few titles of films are listed, in order to clinch a particular argument, as if titles and vague memories speak for themselves. Such an approach is supposedly justified by the inclusion of the fourth section of the book, which does deal with texts. But even here there is often an emphasis on a fairly traditional sociological approach to representation and ideology, which tends too often to reproduce the dominant realist

aesthetic of British film criticism.

There is little attempt to deal with the question of the relation between the productivity of the text and the metapsychology of the spectator, and the way in which the spectator is positioned in the enunciative address of the text, and the critical discourses which circumscribe the meaning of the text. The emphasis is on representation, for instance, rather than point of view; on narrative closure rather than on the permanent struggle between the voyeuristic pull of the narrative and the fetishistic production of visual pleasure¹³; on ideological reproduction rather than tension and excess within the film system. Further, the inheritance of the orthodox realist aesthetic forces a separation of 'realist' films (eg the 'New Wave' films of the early 1960s like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) from 'fantasy' films (eg Hammer horror, or Gainsborough melodrama), and a failure to recognise the fantasising or daydreaming activity of all dominant cinema for the voyeuristic spectator in the darkened auditorium¹⁴. Here Pam Cook's paper on melodrama and the women's picture in *Gainsborough Melodrama* is a useful antidote, although there is the basis on which to transform 'British cinema' as an object for such film theory in several of the contributions to both books.¹⁵



¹³ On voyeurism and fetishism, narrative and visual pleasure, see Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18. See also John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, op cit.

¹⁴ See Christian Metz, op cit.

¹⁵ See eg Ian Green, 'Ealing: in the Comedy Frame', and John Hill, 'Some Theses on the British "New Wave"', both in *British Cinema History*; and Sue Aspinall, 'Sexuality in Costume Melodrama', in *Gainsborough Melodrama*.

The undead as unreal? Hammer's *The Mummy*.

Co-editor Vincent Porter's chapter in *British Cinema History* on 'The Context of Creativity: Ealing Studios and Hammer Films' is exemplary of the sociological approach of the book. It is precisely an argument about the organisation of production and the control of creativity (although it is never made clear precisely what 'creativity' is), and it concentrates on the role of the producer (Michael Balcon at Ealing, James Carreras at Hammer)¹⁶. Ealing and Hammer are perfect objects for Porter's sociological account, being characterised by a regulated, conti-

¹⁶ The similarities between Porter's paper and Barr's work on Ealing (op cit) and Pirie's work on Hammer (op cit) remain substantially unacknowledged.

nuous and relatively long-term production output organised around a studio (=factory) base, and a relatively permanent team of 'creative' workers contributing to a familial atmosphere. The producer, in Porter's analysis, is the key mediating figure between the financial needs of investment capital (the economic base) and the consistency of cultural output (the ideological superstructure). It is a question of

successfully resolving economics and ideology in a manner which may reflect a more general truth about the structural limitations imposed on British film culture from the outside and the constraints which can be imposed on individual creativity within the production unit. (p 180)

Porter thus organises the available empirical material concerning Ealing and Balcon to construct an argument that Balcon organised around him a group of 'creative workers' who would consistently produce films which matched his basically conservative ideological position. To keep his 'team' in line, he would, Porter argues, resort to 'economics in the last analysis', but this was rarely necessary because of the specificities of the organisation of production and socialisation of workers into the occupational ideology of Ealing studios (see especially page 185). The conclusion, for both Ealing and Hammer, is that 'the output of both studios reflected the class interests of their owners', 'expressing the dominant ideology of capitalism' (p 206, my emphasis).

Films thus become products reflecting pre-determined ideological positions, and as such, the burden is lifted on having to analyse them: Porter either resorts to a journalistic gloss, or an emphasis on the avowed *intentions* of the film-makers. After all, in this view, films are simply the products of such intentions framed within the specific organisation of production. Predictably, only the most minimal link is made to Ian Green's textual analysis of the Ealing comedies in the fourth section of the book.

Given the lack of detailed film analysis and the strength of the sociological model in Porter's paper, the question of contradictions, tensions or excess threatening to rupture the film system cannot be entertained. The trajectory from economics to ideology is far too tight. Inevitably, all films will seem to be smothered by a blanketing 'dominant ideology' unless the critic seeks to explain how films articulate and resolve ideological *contradictions*—in the case of Ealing, for instance, how it can produce a sense of wartime national unity and community (which comes to be synonymous with the dominant idea of 'British cinema') in a nation clearly divided by class, sex and region. Thus it is not enough effectively to dismiss Ealing director Robert Hamer as improperly socialised, or to argue, with reference to Hamer and his colleague Alexander Mackendrick, that 'their concerns are but *minor variations* on Balcon's aims and objectives for the distinctive type of British cinema that he wanted to build' (p 186, my emphasis).

Unfortunately, given the pervasiveness of the sociological model, this emphasis too often comes through in the section of the book which does

set out to produce textual analyses of films. The search for continuities, rather than breaks and contradictions within institutions, and the emphasis in film analysis on the point of narrative closure tends to produce all British films as in the end 'conservative'.

Sue Aspinall's paper on 'Women, Realism and Reality in British Films, 1943-53' argues that the majority of melodramas in this period failed adequately to represent the reality of women at the time. This failure is in the end accounted for in terms of the structure of ownership and control in the British film industry, which, as an industry, precisely produces films as products for a 'mass audience', and which is therefore confined to 'formulaic' and 'stereotypical' procedures. As such, the ideological position of the owners of the film industry is mediated via the class position and allegiances of the 'creative workers' of the industry (see especially pp 292-3). So, while Aspinall is able to describe shifts in the representation of women in British films and in the star images of performers, in the end the films have performed a consensual function and 'had helped to resolve an ideological crisis in the post-war period' (p 293).

While there is an obvious truth in this argument, it does in the end mean that films don't have to be analysed in any great depth: the answers have already been provided at the level of the economic. This is reflected in the argumentation of the chapter. Films clearly are discussed, and many useful insights are produced (often limited by the space available), but there is a tendency towards descriptive listings of groups of films (which could almost have been achieved by reading narrative summaries – there is very little visual analysis here), with brief comments on their interest for the essentially sociological argument concerning shifts in the role of women in society and their filmic representation.

John Hill's contribution, 'Working Class Realism and Sexual Reaction: Some Theses on the British "New Wave"', similarly concludes that the 'realist' films of the early 1960s 'far from being "progressive"' (p 310), were in fact reactionary in the solutions they offered on the terrain of sexuality and the family.

By and large, such films end by reproducing an ideology of marital and procreative sexuality... These films also reaffirm the need for male regulation of female sexuality within the marriage institution. (p 310)

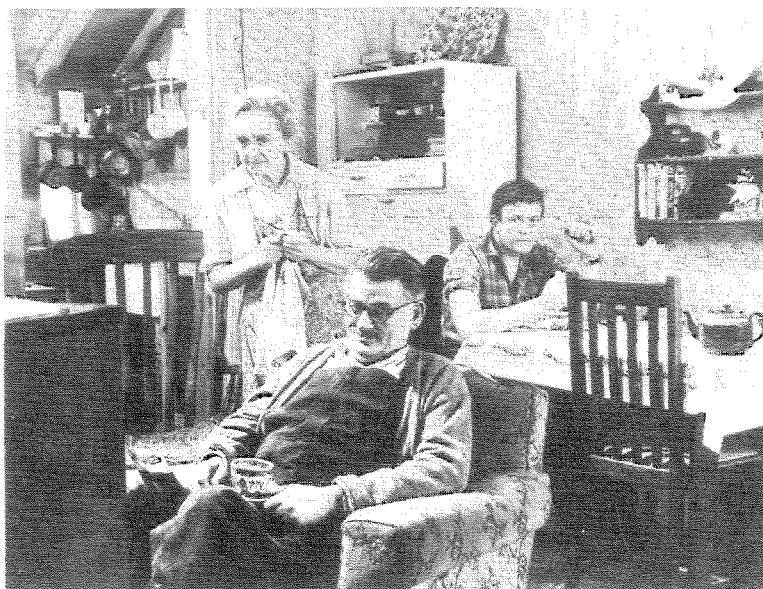
The problem with both Hill's and Aspinall's conclusions is that they are articulated according to a sociological desire for neatness and continuity, a desire for a text to be *either* 'progressive' or 'reactionary', and a refusal to pay attention to the permanent and productive tensions, the play of containment and excess, in the film system.

The seeds of an alternative form of analysis are there in both papers¹⁷, but in Hill's, for instance, it is thwarted by his careful following of only the *logic* of the narrative of a film like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, towards its particular figure of closure and resolution. But the abiding image of the sexually active working class male youth placed out-

¹⁷ The argument is more fully developed in Aspinall's much more interesting and fruitful paper on the costume melodrama in *Gainsborough Melodrama*.

side the confines of the family resists and exceeds this logic, and constitutes a major part of the pleasures of such a film. Significantly, what the critics remember about the end of the film is not Arthur's re-insertion in the family, and the containment of both male and female sexual desire, but his gesture in opposition to this containment, the throwing of the stone at the image of the newly 'affluent' worker's domestic family dwelling, the new housing estate. In addition, there is a far more complex re-negotiation than Hill allows for of the terrain of the 'realist' films of the 1940s, where the family and the community were definitively foregrounded, effectively repressing what continually threatened to emerge as a sexual desire and energy.

The working class male youth versus the family: *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.



The image of an active sexuality in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* is, in the context of post-war British cinema, a resistance to refinement and repression, as Marion Jordan suggests in relation to the 'Carry On' films – which, it might be noted, emerge initially at the same time as the British 'new wave'. In other words, there is an unresolved tension in the film-viewing experience for the spectator, a tension which works over the ideological stresses of the period described by Hill. It is difficult to accept Hill's conclusion that the films are straightforwardly reactionary.

Similarly, Aspinall's article in *British Cinema History* also allows a more interesting approach to emerge on occasions. Certainly, attention is paid to the non-economic 'determination' of existing cultural traditions and conventions of narrative representation (although with the adherence to the idea of *mass* media, the conceptualisation of such conventions is still too often in terms of 'formula' and 'stereotype'). But in her discussion of films, they always *seem* to be offering 'ideologically

progressive' positions and developments, only finally to close off that progressiveness in the interests of the reproduction of a monolithic dominant ideology. Again, however, a full picture of how this work of containment is produced in the film system is lacking. The argument cries out for more detailed analysis of how ideological positions and tensions are actually articulated and worked over in the films—an analysis which could take into account questions of point of view and the experience of film watching as fantasy. If such an analysis were produced, this irreconcilability between moments of apparent 'progressiveness' (moments of excess) and final containment might begin to appear as a fruitful tension in the system.

As Pam Cook argues in her paper in *Gainsborough Melodrama*—and indeed as Aspinall herself argues in the same dossier—there is an inherent contradiction in the melodrama genre:

In order to appeal to a female spectator, melodrama must first posit the possibility of female desire and a female point of view, thus posing problems for itself which it can scarcely contain. (p 21)

The women's picture

has to stimulate desire then channel it through identification into the required paths. It negotiates this contradiction with difficulty, often producing an excess which threatens to deviate from the intended route... Feminists... look for excess as a sign of the system threatening to break down. (p 21)

Cook's analysis thus goes beyond Aspinall's concern in *British Cinema History* with the representation of women, developing 'a more complex notion of the ways in which the genre (melodrama) orders and contains sexual difference' (p 18). But the impact of Cook's argument is of relevance to Hill's paper as well, since even the 'new wave', 'realist' films, as Hill begins to suggest, are melodramas. Indeed, those great 'British' films of the 1940s—films such as *Millions Like Us*, *Brief Encounter* and *This Happy Breed*, named 'realist' and 'quality' films by the critics, and which now epitomise the dominant conception of 'British cinema'—these too are invariably played out on the terrain of the domestic melodrama. Thus, as Aspinall suggests in relation to *Brief Encounter*, very often they address the spectator from a woman's point of view, or at least display a 'feminine' or domestic sense of reality. The narratives are rarely organised around active, goal-directed heroes. And the central tension emerges in the struggle between individual desire and social constraint, which in the 1940s, in the interests of national unity and a sense of community, sees an inexorable foregrounding and celebration of the social (represented as the family or the tight-knit community). The tension is marked carefully both narratively and visually as one where the fulfilment of desire is precisely a wish, a fantasy in a world of 'realism', which means repression: thus Laura's daydream of an impossible wish fulfilment projected on the window of the train in *Brief Encounter*.

¹⁸ In this context, Blanchard and Harvey's paper needs to be read alongside the chapter on independent cinema in John Ellis' *Visible Fictions*, op cit.

The terrain has been somewhat transformed by the early 1960s when, as Hill suggests, the family and community now represent only the background or setting. This provides a space for the exploration of the desires of that new ideological category, the 'working class' youth outside of, and hence unrepressed by, the family. Again some of the films – notably *A Taste of Honey* – are clearly women's pictures: a fitting irony given the 'orthodox' critics' professed hatred of the melodrama. The reasons for the acceptance of certain melodramas in British film culture therefore need to be carefully worked through.

I want now to return to the question of independent cinema. Simon Blanchard and Sylvia Harvey's paper in *British Cinema History*, 'Post-War Independent Cinema: Structure and Organisation', concentrates on the period 1966-81, and specifically on the practices associated with the Independent Film-makers Association, in what is now often called the grant-aided sector. For a book which attempts to review the whole ninety-year history of British cinema, it seems something of a step forward that the independent sector is granted space at all, but I would argue that the placing of this chapter in the context of the sociological model severely truncates the implications of the independent cinema movement for the institution of cinema and British film culture. It is not simply that the authors' brief prevents them from being able to discuss any films – although they do at least acknowledge this absence, unlike some of the other authors¹⁸. Rather, the problem lies in the sociological trajectory of *British Cinema History* which renders independent cinema just another way of organising film production.

To place independent cinema alongside studies of Ealing or Hammer or James Bond films or the organisation of propaganda and censorship in World War II is to represent independent cinema as no more than a minor episode in the history of 'British cinema' – and indeed it finds no place in the discussion of the dominant structural relations of the industry in section two of the book. This marginalisation is not fortuitous. According to the logic of the economist argument, independent cinema could only be seen as marginal in relation to the major companies of the capitalist film industry; it could only be seen as one among many other means of organising film production. But the independent sector has always been more than simply a way of organising film production. Thus Harvey and Blanchard claim that independent cinema

has developed as a movement which is concerned to re-think and re-construct that history, to think and work over the basic questions about what the cinema and film-making amount to . . . historically, politically and as a cultural inheritance. (p 228)

The independent cinema movement thus exists as a new and radical theory and practice of cinema, which, in terms of the formal strategies it adopts, its political commitment, and its modes of funding, production, distribution, exhibition and education, represents a potential challenge to the dominant cinema institution and the parameters of British film

culture. The implications are negated however by the insertion of the discussion of independent cinema into a discourse which really has no space for such a non-economistic conception of cinema. On the other hand, it is difficult, and perhaps wrong, to assert a homogeneity of practices, a programmatic unity to independent cinema. Further, it may well be that the current possibilities in relation to Channel 4 and the ACTT workshop agreement do produce a sector of independent cinema as precisely a different means of organising film production – but there is still the question of the challenge to dominant cinema at the level of representation. The complexities of the argument, however, can only emerge with difficulty within the bounds of a mass media conception of the cinema institution.

The adherence to this sociological model of the institution also prevents the maintenance of a proper distance from the dominant critical aesthetic of realism. Too often, in both the books under review, it is implicitly assumed that the term 'realism' can be used unproblematically, and that the orthodox distinction between 'realist' films and 'non-realist' or 'fantasy' films is adequate. Vincent Porter for instance distinguishes Ealing and Hammer on the basis of Michael Balcon's distinction between 'realism' and 'tinsel', but this is simply one of the more extreme statements in a body of work which, apart from a few significant cases, fails to treat the dominant critical discourse to the examination it deserves. The terms of that discourse must be unravelled in order to understand why *certain* British films have been vaunted and valorised, if the same seemingly trenchant conception of 'British cinema' is not to be repeatedly reproduced.

The central problem with so much writing on British cinema is precisely its allegiance to a particular realist aesthetic. In fact, narrative cinema deals less with 'reality' than with *images* of reality: that is, ideology, or more properly, fantasy – in Christian Metz's terms, cinema is the '*imaginary* signifier'. Clearly, different films, and particularly different genres of film mark themselves as *more* realistic, or *more* 'fantastic' (this is particularly evident in British film culture), but it needs to be recognised that such marking is always in relation to a particular understanding of cinema, a particular critical discourse, a particular sense of realism. All dominant cinema, all 'classic realist texts', work as fantasy for the spectator, but at the same time they make greater or lesser claims on our rapture and credibility, continually playing on this thrilling tension between believing that the diegetic world is real, and recognising that it is fantasy, between seeing the fiction as present and recognising it as absent. Thus a 'new wave', 'realist' film like *A Kind of Loving* demanded (and achieved in the moment of the early 1960s) that it be read as 'real', whereas a Gainsborough costume melodrama made far less claims on our credulity, as Sue Aspinall points out (in *Gainsborough Melodrama*). But this does not mean, as Aspinall claims, that the costume melodrama is not a 'classic realist text', rather that it is a particular variant of it, dependent more on the inclinations of the spectator towards fantasy than the ability to suspend disbelief.

Nor, on the other hand, does it mean that the Gainsborough melodrama has less relationship with the real issues of its time than, say, *A Kind of Loving* has with its. Another major presumption of orthodox British film criticism's realist aesthetic is that it is somehow realistic to portray working class people as fully rounded, psychologically developed characters, at the centre of the fiction—an idea which finds its way into the pages of the two books under review. As such, a film like *A Kind of Loving* 'spontaneously' appears as 'realist'. The grounds for this spontaneity are complex, involving, at least, the sense of transgression of prevailing conventions, and an appeal to the moral aspects of the realist aesthetic—but, and this is crucial, it is also dependent on cinema's ability to *show* the empirical world, to produce it as *present* for the spectator (hence the emphasis on iconography in so much film criticism). The 'realism' of *A Kind of Loving*, then, is dependent on certain devices or conventions which mark its fictional world as more present and more real than, say, that of a Gainsborough costume melodrama like *The Wicked Lady*. The *mise-en-scène* of *The Wicked Lady*, however, as Aspinall's and Cook's work on the melodrama suggests, marks the fictional world as precisely in the realm of fantasy. But both *The Wicked Lady* and *A Kind of Loving* deal with fantasies produced by the existing ideological tensions and crises of, respectively, the mid 1940s, and the early 1960s. Their fictions worry over specific ideological problems (in both cases, as Aspinall and Hill point out, problems related to sexual desire); they seek first to give voice to, and then to resolve, the irreconcilable possibilities (in this case in relation to sexual activity and the institution of the family) produced in the respective conjunctures. In this sense both films are equally 'realistic', marking, in their formally different ways, the bounds of the representable for the mid 1940s and the early 1960s. In this context, a 1930s film in the upper middle class tradition of West End



Another family fiction in a fantasy *mise-en-scène*: Gainsborough's *The Wicked Lady*.

theatre, where working class people appear only as the servants of a bourgeois way of life, is just as 'realistic' as, say, *A Kind of Loving* in representing a particular class-bound conception of a specific class culture.

If the two books under review too often reproduce the orthodox distinction between the 'realism' of Ealing, and the 'fantasy' of Gainsborough, it is due to a consistent failure to go beyond Metz's first machine (the industrial machine) in the theorisation of the institution of cinema. This is particularly the case with *British Cinema History*, which lacks any attempt to work through systematically either questions of the metapsychology of the spectator¹⁹, or of the 'writing' machine as objects worthy of study. Prevailing definitions of 'British cinema' seep into the text of *British Cinema History* despite a number of the chapters which, to a greater or lesser extent, work towards a critique of such definitions. Against this the most useful intervention is precisely *Gainsborough Melodrama*, with its laying bare of an other, repressed side of British cinema. Pam Cook's paper is particularly important, especially her argument (which the rest of the dossier fails to pick up on) that Gainsborough's project needs to be seen as part of the crucial mid-1940s movement to establish a 'quality', 'British' cinema, a national cinema distinct from Hollywood.

The institution of British cinema as an object for historical investigation needs to be re-conceptualised. This seems to me to be exactly what Raymond Williams proposes in 'British Film History: New Perspectives', the opening chapter of *British Cinema History*. One of his arguments here is that histories of film too often tend to be organised chronologically, as indeed *British Cinema History* is; in place of this, he suggests that a more appropriate history would be one that looked at cinema from a number of different points of view, or in relation to a number of different bearings which cut across fixed chronological periods. (Unfortunately, Williams makes no reference to existing histories of *British* cinema, nor to what he understands British cinema to be.) The four headings under which Williams suggests film history should be considered are (a) the actual technology of cinema and its uses; (b) the relations between film and popular culture; (c) the relations between film and 'established culture'; and (d) the relations between film and modernist culture.

These do not form a linear progression but a set of lateral and eventually interactive relations. (p 12)

Williams' discussion of these four bearings on cinema is extremely suggestive, but the editors of the book have taken no heed of his propositions (indeed one wonders why the chapter is here at all). I want to explore his approach more closely in relation to the actual historical developments of cinema in the United Kingdom, particularly the relationship between film and ideas of a *national* culture. In this way it might be possible to pull together the discrete objects the institution has become in *British Cinema History*.

¹⁹ Significantly, Philip Corrigan's paper on audiences in *British Cinema History*, far from being the 'pioneering study' the editors claim it to be, fails to engage with the major debates on either the metapsychology of the spectator, or the sociological account of audience 'effects'.

The central theme, around which the others revolve, must then be the 'struggle' to produce a national cinema; a struggle over meanings, and a struggle at the level of the economy, which has been undertaken variously by critics, the State, the owners of the industry, and film-makers alike. The extent to which the struggle has been caught up with questions of patriotism and profit, as Jeffrey Richards shows in his paper on 'British Imperial Cinema of the 1930s' also needs to be examined: too often the authors of *British Cinema History* fail to recognise the problems involved in a national cinema organised around a patriotic sense of Britishness and national identity and a capitalist sense of profit, assuming, almost, that any film produced by a protected film industry would be 'progressive'.

A related theme is the consistent attempts to produce filmic projections of Britishness, which Rosaleen Smyth, on films for the colonies in the 1930s and 1940s, Stuart Hood, on the Empire Marketing Board film unit, and Jeffrey Richards, on cinema of the Empire in the 1930s, all develop in relation to an imperialist projection of Britishness. The other side of such projections is the more familiar domestic image of the people of Britain as a community, a national unity, which the existing work on Ealing films deals with very adequately. Related to this must be an attempt to theorise the metapsychology of the spectator with reference to 'national subjectivity', and the address of films which are valorised as specifically 'British' films²⁰.

The question of realism is clearly important here, and needs to be developed along the lines already indicated. In this context, it should be added that, like the chapter on independent cinema, a separate chapter in *British Cinema History* on the 'official' documentary film movement as a discrete production unit specific to the 1930s fails to do justice to the centrality of the documentary idea, or ideology, to British film culture, and simply reproduces Grierson's own conception of the movement.

Vis-à-vis British cinema as national cinema, the 1940s are clearly the pivotal period, particularly the mid 1940s and World War II.²¹ As has been suggested by others, British cinema—or rather that which we recognise spontaneously as 'British cinema'—of the war period looks back to, and is dependent on, developments of the 1930s, while all developments since the 1940s return in one way or another to the 1940s. Various papers in *British Cinema History* draw attention to a strong rhetoric in the late 1920s and 1930s asserting the supposed power and pervasiveness of cinema, and hence the crucial need to develop a *national* cinema, a project which came to fruition on the basis of the 1930s documentary film movement, and in the ideological and economic conditions of the war period. Under these conditions, the rhetoric could be transformed into a concern for propaganda, mobilising both the 'realist' and 'imperialist' traditions of the 1930s to produce a sense of Britain as a nation united, a community unfractured by divisions of class, sex, or region. The problems of patriotism become only too clear here. In addition, the requirements of propaganda forced film-makers, critics and others to take film seriously—and indeed those films which functioned as

²⁰ Annette Kuhn has begun this project in her article 'Desert Victory and the People's War', *Screen* vol 22 no 2, pp 45-68.

²¹ This is the subject of the 1983 BFI Summer School, 'National Fictions – Struggles over the Meaning of World War II'. See also Caroline Merz's review of the World War II Cinema Weekend at Cinema City, Norwich, elsewhere in this issue.

propaganda became re-written in film culture as the 'quality' films which formed the core for that movement of the mid 1940s which moves film historians to refer to this period as the Golden Age of British cinema.²²

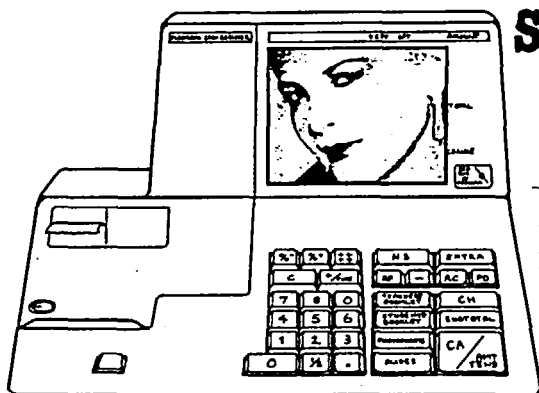
In order to combat prevailing definitions of British cinema, however, it also becomes necessary to work on those contradictions, tensions and raptures which mark British cinema and British film culture—both within those films and movements accepted by the critics, and by interventions such as those around Gainsborough, Hammer, and the 'Carry On' films: all films which signify an other side of British cinema.

Finally, it would be fruitful to consider the institution in terms of traditions of independence, a term which, as Harvey and Blanchard point out, is always relational, and which is almost better characterised in terms of relations of *dependence*. Thus, there is the 'independence' of the British film industry and film culture in relation to Hollywood; there is the 'independence' of small production, distribution and exhibition companies and low-budget films made for a limited, domestic market in relation to the practices and productivity of the majors; and there is the 'independence' of the IFA-related, grant-aided sector of the 1970s and 1980s in relation to dominant cinema. In this context, it would make more sense to develop work on the 'official' documentary movement and the labour movement films of the 1930s more closely with that on the post-war movement, thus enabling the critiques of the dominant cinema institution to be stated more forcefully.²³

In the end, discussions of British cinema which continue to construct the idea of a national film culture in terms of a realism different to what is posed as Hollywood's fantasies overlook the many different relations which need to be taken into account. As the work of independent cinema in the 1970s and '80s has shown, independence is always a far more complex matter than simply opposing Hollywood.

²² See John Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality—Terms for a Cinema in the Forties and Seventies', *Screen* Autumn 1978, vol 19 no 3, pp 9-49, for an account of the 'quality' film movement of the mid 1940s.

²³ See in this context Don MacPherson (ed), *Traditions of Independence*, London, British Film Institute, 1980.



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A RIVAL TO HOLLYWOOD?

THE BRITISH FILM INDUSTRY IN THE THIRTIES, BY ROBERT MURPHY

¹ PEP (Political and Economic Planning), *The British Film Industry*, London, 1952, p 43.

CRUCIAL INDICES like the output of coal and steel show that as early as the 1880s Britain had been surpassed by America as a great economic power. But, having survived the First World War with their Empire intact, it was not difficult for Britons to delude themselves that they were citizens of the world's most powerful State. Though in most areas of trade and industry Americans were encroaching on traditionally British preserves, Hollywood's domination of the international film industry attracted special attention. Britain, despite an eager population of cinema-goers, had never had a significant film production industry. In 1910, for example, only fifteen per cent of the films released were of British origin (compared to 36 per cent French, 28 per cent American, seventeen per cent Italian), but, by the mid-'20s, the percentage had shrunk to such a degree that the British film seemed in danger of extinction. In the pre-war period only the film trade would have been concerned about this, but by the 1920s the ideological importance of the cinema began to be taken seriously. Once seen as a childish novelty suitable only for distracting the working classes from their beer, film progressed to a major preoccupation of industrialists worried about the advertising advantages enjoyed by their American rivals and politicians worried about the corrosion of British values.

In 1926, only 34 of the 748 long films released were British, and Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin declared that

*the time has come when the position of the industry should be examined with a view to seeing whether it be not possible, as it is desirable on natural grounds, to see that the larger proportion of films exhibited in this country are British.*¹

Old-guard British producers welcomed the prospect of protection, but they were hardly representative of the industry as a whole. Distributors, the most important of which were the subsidiaries of the American 'majors', were naturally hostile to any attempt to curb their hegemony, and exhibitors who had waxed fat on the profits of showing American films were worried lest government interference kill the goose that laid the golden egg. There were even divisions on the production side, with

dynamic entrepreneurs like Herbert Wilcox and Michael Balcon, who had established themselves by adopting American methods and American stars, annoyed that their less dynamic fellow-producers were to be artificially preserved. The Cinematograph Film Act of 1927 was thus a compromise measure, seemingly modest enough to avoid strenuous opposition or to bring about major changes: blind booking was outlawed, advance booking restricted to six months ahead, and distributors and exhibitors were required to fulfil an annually increasing quota of British films – distributors 7½ per cent, exhibitors 5 per cent, rising by 2½ per cent a year.

The caution expressed in the government's proposals, and in the film trade's reluctance to consider a serious challenge to Hollywood, contrasts markedly with the patriotic enthusiasm with which investors speculated on the fortunes of British film production. *The Economist* warned its readers that

*the production boom of 1927, which was set in motion by the introduction of the Films Bill, may prove to have been one of the most disastrous episodes in the annals of British company finance.*²

Sure enough, of the twelve companies floated in the 1927/8 boom, eight had gone bankrupt by mid-1931. Britain was ill-prepared in terms of personnel and physical resources to undertake a rapid expansion in film production. As the trade journal, the *Kinematograph Weekly*, disgustingly pointed out at the beginning of 1929,

*Half the British directors who have made films this year ought never to be allowed in studios again. Half the studios that have been used this year should be scrapped forthwith and half the heads of production firms should gracefully retire from a business to which their proved incompetence is a menace.*³

The *Economist* claimed that if a film cost more than £25,000 it was unlikely to make a profit on distribution in the British market alone. Many of the new production companies spent much more on their films, arrogantly assuming that they could command a world market. Balcon and Wilcox had been able to score one-off successes but as fellow producer John Maxwell pointed out,

*America was almost self-supporting, and as their films were produced in a manner most acceptable to their own people, there was no reason why they should go outside for pictures. In addition, those producing organisations that owned theatres naturally hesitated to accept films which would mean giving up play-dates required by their own product.*⁴

And generally,

*when we send our pictures over there, we find that the doors of their theatres are bolted and barred in our faces.*⁵

² *The Economist*, April 20, 1929.

³ *Kine Weekly*, January 3, 1929, p 50.

⁴ *Kine Weekly*, March 29, 1928, p 29.

⁵ *Kine Weekly*, August 28, 1930, p 25.

⁶ *Kine Weekly*,
November 17
1930, p 23.

⁷ *World Film News*,
January 1937.

⁸ A Brunel, *Nice
Work*, London,
1949, p 166.

Of the 101 British films made in 1927, only half a dozen got any sort of distribution in America.

The coming of sound seemed to offer new hope to the Quota Companies. Surely even Americans would prefer the nicely enunciated English of RADA-trained actors to the coarse utterances of their hitherto popular screen players? British exhibitors knew their audiences rather better and became increasingly vociferous over the unpopular British films they were obliged to show to fulfil the quota provisions. In the north of England and in Scotland, the lah-di-dah accents of British actors aroused derision and hostility while the racy vivacity of American slang quickly became a vital part of popular culture. As one Scottish cinema owner politely put it:

*quite definitely the Scottish ear is genuinely offended by our actors' diction; they affect a cultured accent which irritates the Scot acutely.*⁶

English working-class audiences were equally offended; one East End exhibitor reported that his patrons

*like good pictures, good American pictures, pictures of movement and action. They won't stand British pictures here at any price. When we have one in the programme, many of our patrons come in late to avoid seeing the British picture.*⁷

Many of the Quota Companies didn't even get as far as producing 'talkies' – their squandered resources and tarnished reputations made it difficult to raise the new capital necessary to re-equip for sound. The Quota Act ensured that film production of a kind continued, but the Americans fulfilled their quota obligations in the cheapest possible way: by commissioning 'quota quickies'. Shot in cramped, old-fashioned studios with only the most basic sets, the cheapest actors and virtually sweated labour for the film crew, these films were often of such appalling quality that they were booed off the screen. However, as Adrian Brunel, a talented, if eccentric, British director who became 'King of the Quota Quickies' pointed out –

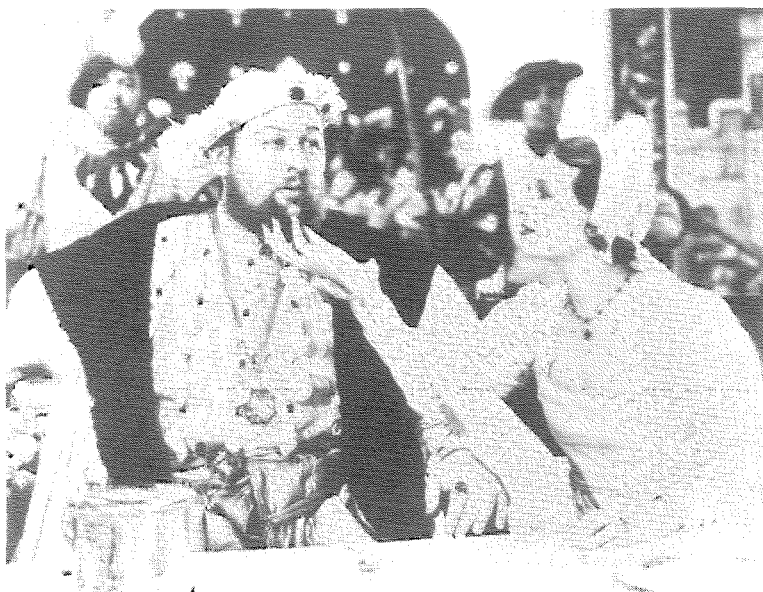
*For most British film-makers, it was this or nothing. Many experienced and promising directors, cameramen, editors and artists fell by the way and were relegated to obscurity or went out of the industry. Conditions were just too tough for them. But others won through. Gradually there evolved a technique of production which avoided finesse, risky experiment and subtle touches; treatments were straightforward and simplified; many technicians and artists got continuity of employment for the first time and became expert performers in their various fields, a number of them graduating to big production.*⁸

Moreover, many American companies realised that the bad publicity over Quota Quickies was detrimental to their interests and began commissioning more reasonably budgeted films. Paramount arranged for

Herbert Wilcox's British and Dominions Film Corporation, one of the few British companies to survive the coming of sound, to produce twelve pictures at an average cost of £30,000 each, and Warner Brothers set up their own production organisation at a small studio at Teddington.

The other main area of British film production in the early thirties centred around two large vertically integrated concerns – the Associated British Picture Corporation, with large studios at Elstree, and the Gaumont British Picture Corporation, linked to Michael Balcon's Gainsborough's studio in Islington. John Maxwell, production head at Elstree, quickly realised the dangers of producing large budget films, and managed to make a profit during the worst years of the transition to sound by turning out programme pictures for his rapidly expanding ABC cinema circuit. Gainsborough had had its fortunes blighted by a serious fire, which destroyed the interior of the studio just after it had been equipped for sound. But early in 1932 the Gaumont British studio at Shepherds Bush, which had undergone a costly and protracted re-building programme, was brought into operation and Michael Balcon began an enterprising and varied production programme there with the first internationally successful British sound film, *Rome Express*.

By 1932, Britain seemed to be forging a film production industry after all, while Hollywood, which had seemed to take the transition to sound in its stride, was heavily hit by the Depression. In 1931, Warner Brothers lost eight million dollars and another fourteen million dollars the following year; the other American majors fared little better. It is in this context that one must understand the extraordinary impact of the success of Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, released through United Artists at the Radio City Music Hall in New York, in October 1933.



The successful 'British' film, 1933-style: *The Private Life of Henry VIII*.

⁹ Karol Kulik,
*Alexander Korda:
The Man Who
Could Work
Miracles*, London,
1975, p 89.

¹⁰ *World Film News*,
September 1937, p
18.

¹¹ *Kine Weekly*,
October 1, 1936,
Supplement to
commemorate the
opening of
Pinewood studios.

Henry VIII, which grossed 500,000 dollars over the next year⁹, seemed to provide convincing proof that, if only they were produced on high enough budgets and to the right formula, British films could be massively successful, not only at home, but in America and the world market. British film production could now be regarded like any other new industry which, having overcome its teething problems, could be expected to pay a lucrative return on investment. Korda's London Film Productions was launched as a public company with capital of £825,000 and his chief financial supporters, the Prudential Assurance Company, encouraged him to build lavish new studios at Denham. United Artists was so enthusiastic over Korda's success that they offered him a partnership in the company.

Korda's success encouraged an influx of cosmopolitan talent, particularly from Germany where the Nazi take-over threatened the livelihood and safety of socialists and Jews. When Denham opened up its seven stages in April 1936, it provided a home for: Atlantic Films, founded by Hungarian director Alexander Esway; Criterion Films, headed by Douglas Fairbanks Jnr and Rumanian-born producer Marcell Hellman; Lothar Mendes' Pall Mall Productions; Joe Schenck and Paul Czinner's Inter-Allied Film Productions; Pendennis Productions, headed by Erich Pommer; British Cine-Alliance, run by Hungarian producer Arnold Pressburger; Garrett-Clement Productions, founded by Czech book publisher Otto Klement; and the Capitol Film Corporation, headed by Viennese expatriates Max Schach, Karl Grune and Paul Stein. Not surprisingly, there were worries that Britain was escaping from American hegemony only to fall under a yet more alien one, and complaints were made that what was needed was film production which

*under the creative control of British people, should bring to the screen something of the life, tradition and culture of Britain and its Empire.*¹⁰

But production seemed to be expanding at such a rate that there was room for everybody.

Studio building was not confined to Denham. Pinewood, opened six months later, was smaller but more cleverly designed and more costly; the Russian-born financier Paul Soskin planned enormous new studios at Boreham Wood in association with Columbia and, though the deal fell through, the studios were built and eventually occupied by MGM; Sound City at Shepperton and the Joe Rock studio at Elstree both underwent £500,000 expansion programmes; and new stages were built at small studios like Twickenham and Teddington. As the boom got underway, *Kine Weekly* congratulated the industry on its progress:.

*When one recalls the wretched, bleak sheds, barns and huts, the mud and general discomfort of many British studios of 15 years ago, it is possible to realise the strides and opportunities of today, when physical hardships are reduced to a minimum thanks to bold and considerate planning.*¹¹

Anticipating saleable quality pictures, United Artists reached distribution agreements with all the independent Denham producers, announcing optimistically

*We now have more British units producing than American, and we have double as many production units altogether as we had last year.*¹²

Other American companies were more cautious, but Warner Brothers promised expansion at Teddington and an exchange of stars between Britain and Burbank. MGM promised, and eventually carried out, a programme of Hollywood-scale productions, and Twentieth Century-Fox not only opened its own small studio at Wembley, but hired studio space at Denham for a programme of prestige productions including Britain's first Technicolor feature, *Wings of the Morning* (1936). The March 1936 reorganisation of Universal resulted in a consortium of British businessmen, led by J Arthur Rank, acquiring a 25 per cent share in the company and the merger of Universal's British distribution network with the Rank-backed General Film Distributors.

Where there had been one or two big pictures a year in the early 1930s, by 1936 there were dozens. In 1928, the total value of British films in production amounted to £500,000, in 1937 it was £7 million. Michael Balcon, production chief at Gaumont British, which had embarked on a series of lavish epics such as *Jew Suss* and *The Tunnel*, boisterously declared:

*The growth of the film industry in this country during the past few years, and the welcome extended to British pictures, not only in our own Dominions but in the vast American market, have proved beyond doubt that in order to progress still further we must pursue a production policy ever less and less parochial and more and more international in appeal. 'Internationalisation' sums up G-B's policy.*¹³

There were warning voices, however, that all was not well. John Maxwell, Managing Director of the Associated British Picture Corporation, which had stood warily aloof from the scramble, claimed that

*British film production seems to be looked upon as a sort of new Klondike – a land flowing with easy money for all and sundry. Large sums are being spent extravagantly and wastefully, with the result that costs are being forced up.*¹⁴

As the one major producer uninvolved in the dubious financial practices which made the boom possible, Maxwell was quite happy to expose them. In late 1936, he drew attention to the activities of insurance companies in financing film production, asserting that

it is a regular thing for a man who wants to make a picture to form a £100 company for the purpose, to get a firm of insurance brokers to fix up a loan for him by issuing guarantee policies to banks who give overdrafts. The bank takes a mortgage on the picture and collects its proceeds and when in a year or

¹² *Kine Weekly*, August 13, 1936, p 5. UA announced that it had £2½ million to spend on British films and intended to invest £1,200,000 in six London film productions, £80,000 in two British and Dominions films, £250,000 in two Max Schach productions, £80,000 on a film from the British Cine-Alliance company, £160,000 on two Victor Saville films, £200,000 on three from Criterion, £300,000 on two from Erich Pommer, £150,000 on two from Garrett-Klement, £100,000 on an Atlantic production and another £75,000 on one from Pall Mall – all for worldwide distribution.

¹³ *World Film News*, June 1936, p 6

¹⁴ *Kine Weekly*, September 5, 1935 p 19.

¹⁵ *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1936.

¹⁶ F D Klingender and S Legg, *Money Behind the Screen*, London 1937.

¹⁷ Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company Built by the Stars*, Wisconsin 1976.

two the loss (as it usually is) is ascertained, the underwriter pays up the shortage.¹⁵

His assertions were given detailed statistical backing from an extraordinary survey of the British film industry carried out by F D Klingender and Stuart Legg for *World Film News*, and re-published as a pamphlet, *Money Behind the Screen*, in January 1937.

By this time there were visible signs of the developing crisis. Twickenham, where Julius Hagen had launched into prestige production as early as 1933 with *The Wandering Jew*, went bankrupt with liabilities of £500,000; Max Schach, the most important of the independent producers, decided he could no longer afford the high rents charged at Denham studios and moved to shabbier and cheaper Shepperton; similarly Herbert Wilcox announced he would vacate Pinewood for the small, old-fashioned Beaconsfield studio. Even Korda began to talk of the need to curb extravagance. The *Money Behind the Screen* exposé showed the crisis to be much more serious than had been realised,¹⁶ pointing out that

One of the most striking features of this expansion from a financial point of view, is the fact that on the production side it is based almost entirely on expectation without any concrete results to justify that optimism, for the older companies that confine their activities to production, or production and renting, have for a number of years not been showing any substantial profits The second peculiar feature which applies to all branches of the industry is that the expansion has with few outstanding exceptions been financed not by increases in the companies' own working capital, but by a spectacular increase in loans (whereas in 'normal' booms the actual increase in business usually enables the expanding enterprises largely to liquidate existing loan obligations.)¹⁶

Maxwell warned his over-ambitious rivals that only around ten pictures a year grossed as much as £100,000 in Britain (a return of about £65,000 to the producer) and that most of these would be American films. Nonetheless, while money was easy to raise, producers gaily lavished sums ranging from £60-150,000 on their pictures. (Korda spent £350,000 on his two H G Wells epics, *Things To Come* and *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*.) As in the late 1920s, the assumption was that the films would recoup their costs in the American market.

Unfortunately, the link with United Artists, on which so much hope was pinned, proved to be disastrously ineffectual. With no tied cinema chains and a weak selling organisation, UA was able to make little headway in introducing British films to American audiences. According to Tino Balio:

Of the ten pictures Korda delivered to the company after 'Henry VIII', only one, René Clair's 'The Ghost Goes West', could be considered a success. In his first year as a UA partner he lost £200,000 on the distribution of his films.¹⁷

The non-Korda films handled by UA fared even worse. Victor Saville, disgusted with the way his films had been treated, broke his contract with the company and threatened to sue if they refused to release him. Most of the independent production units vanished into thin air and late in 1938 Korda relinquished control of Denham studios to his main creditor, the Prudential. By this time the insurance groups had lost at least £3 million and Gaumont British had been forced to close down its British and American distribution set-ups and its Shepherds Bush studio, complaining that its films had failed in America

*not because of any lack of merit but because we are not accorded playing time in the most important situations, these being almost exclusively controlled by American producing interests.*¹⁸

The American market was extremely difficult to penetrate, but even with American co-operation, it would have been difficult to make profitable these costly, indulgent epics. The fact that Korda's *Henry VIII* was loosely historical encouraged his imitators to embark on a series of lavish, ponderous costume dramas, what *Kine Weekly* called 'the ultra-dignified, heavily artistic film costing three times as much as usual (which) satisfies neither the showman, the public or the critics'.¹⁹ When the phase passed the British film industry reverted to its traditional concern with upper class frolics, much to the frustration of those who wanted British cinema to emulate the populist films of Frank Capra and the Warner Brothers social dramas in their concern with 'ordinary people'. In an article entitled 'Why not feature the man in the street', the studio correspondent of *Kine Weekly* complained that whereas Hollywood had evolved a whole class of films featuring taxi-drivers, truck drivers, clerks, cops, garage hands, shop girls,

*The English film when it can drag itself away from Plymouth Hoe or Hampton Court and when it can forget 1588 and 1815, things to come and all that, totters only as far as Piccadilly or St James, or country houses with 40 bedrooms . . . Working class folk are left to the broad comedians, and our heroes and heroines seem to travel first class through life.*²⁰

and as Alfred Hitchcock acidly commented:

*The higher you run your finger up the British social scale, the faster the drama dies. The veneer of civilization is so thick among the rich that individual qualities are killed. There is nothing to film, nothing worth putting on the screen. Voices are the same, expressions are nil, personalities are suppressed. The upper classes are too 'bottled up' to be of any use as colourful screen material, too stiffened with breeding to relax into the natural easiness and normality required by the screen.*²¹

It wasn't just the subject matter which troubled British films. Several witnesses attest to the sloppiness of British production methods. F M Guedella, UA's English financial adviser, sent in a confidential report on life with Korda at Denham:

¹⁸ *Kine Weekly*, April 11, 1937, p 3.

¹⁹ *Kine Weekly*, June 18, 1936, p 35.

²⁰ *Kine Weekly*, September 24, 1936, p 37.

²¹ *World Film News*, February 1937, p 15.

²² Balio op cit, p 145.

*It is his own folly and the way he occupies his time that causes all his films to be so expensive. In the end they are made with undue rush. Also, I am sorry to say, owing to the way the whole studio is run, they are not made with that snappy perfection which characterises the great Hollywood films.*²²

And the studio correspondent of *Kine Weekly* complained persistently of units shooting with inadequate rehearsals and unfinished scripts, the effect of 'obstinate, inexperienced studio control'.

The policy of bringing in American stars and 'ace' technicians on the assumption that the 'quota quickie'-trained natives would not be able to cope with big-budget films, while making some sense as a temporary measure, caused a great deal of bitterness and resentment. When top stars were employed they often gave less than their best in the haphazard surroundings of a British studio (Marlene Dietrich, for example, seems to sleep-walk through her part in Korda's *Knight Without Armour* for which she was paid £50,000). But more often than not Hollywood would only release its second-rate or fading stars, who were often edgy and temperamental, uneasily aware that employment in a British film was regarded in Hollywood as the first step towards oblivion. American technicians, who it was hoped would train their British underlings, often preferred to keep their knowledge a closely guarded secret and thus secure their continued employment.

An air of gloomy introspection hung over the British film industry as it entered 1938, but some lessons had been learnt. Forties film production was notably more proficient and, for a time, Britain did produce films which were as good as those of Hollywood. Between 1944 and 1949, J Arthur Rank fought a persistent and carefully conceived campaign to win a share of the American market. Because of his controlling interest in Universal, Rank was able to exert considerable pressure to ensure the effective marketing of his films, and with lavish spectacles like *The Red Shoes*, *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, clever adaptations of literary classics like David Lean's *Great Expectations*, stylish psychological dramas like Sydney Box's *The Seventh Veil*, Rank had a body of films which had stars and production values that equalled those of Hollywood. Even so, he encountered considerable resistance, not only from American business interests, who had no desire to encourage interlopers, but from the American public, suspicious and hostile to anything culturally esoteric. Despite a few remarkable successes (*The Red Shoes* went on to gross the then phenomenal sum of five million dollars) the campaign as a whole was a failure and led to a severe contraction of Rank's production operations.

It did, however, succeed in establishing the reputation of British films as adult, sophisticated and different among a small, but expanding, middle-class audience who tended to turn their noses up at Hollywood. Art house cinemas expanded rapidly in the late 1940s, relying largely on a diet of British films and though Rank withdrew from the mass market, British films continued to enjoy a cult following throughout the 1950s. Films almost self-parodying in their Englishness—the later Ealing

²³ T H Guback, *The International Film Industry*, Indiana 1969, p 76.

²⁴ *Kine Weekly*, December 13, 1956

²⁵ A representative sample of British box office successes in the last 30 years would include: *Alien*—45,000,000 dollars; *Moonraker*—33,934,074 dollars; *The Muppet Movie*—32,000,000 dollars; *The Shining*—30,900,000 dollars; *Chariots of Fire*—29,600,000 dollars; *Murder on the Orient Express*—19,124,000 dollars;

comedies, for example—enjoyed a popularity in America which often exceeded their appreciation in Britain. This modest critical success provided British film producers with only small additional profits. Most films were sold to American distributors for a relatively insignificant flat fee. In 1957 the Rank Organisation attempted once again to grab a more substantial share of the US box office. Twelve distribution exchanges were set up in the major American cities and cinemas were leased as showcases for the Rank product. After eighteen months the attempt was abandoned. Sir John Davis, the Rank Chairman, admitted that

*there was no reasonable prospect of achieving a profitable operation. . . . Our attempts to open up this valuable market for British films through our own distribution organisation have thus failed, but I feel that at the time we commenced the venture we were justified in our efforts. Unfortunately, the trend of the industry has been against us.*²³

In fact, trends favoured the reception of British films in America. The 1948 divorce decrees and the growth of television had seriously shaken the monolithic position of the Hollywood majors. Cinemas closed, but at a less rapid rate than the decline in production. For the first time since 1914, America welcomed foreign films as a means of making up the shortfall. In practice many of the films imported were their own 'runaway productions'. The need to use blocked earnings and the availability of production subsidies encouraged American companies to produce and invest in British and Continental films. By the mid-50s over 30 per cent of the films made in Britain had some form of American involvement.²⁴ John Huston's *African Queen* and *Moby Dick*, for example, were technically British films, though in terms of stars, themes and, production values, they were indistinguishable from those of Hollywood.

An increasing reliance on foreign locations, and a familiarity with foreign stars and directors—albeit within a Hollywood format (*The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *The Guns of Navarone*, for example)—led to a gradual erosion of the insularity of American audiences. By the '60s the middle-class penchant for British culture had spread to a much wider audience and 'swinging Britain' films like *Tom Jones*, *Georgie Girl*, *Alfie* and the Bond adventures proved highly successful at the box office.²⁵ Most of these films had American backing, which obviously increased their chance of effective distribution.

For independently-made British films, the American market remains difficult to penetrate effectively. Handmade Pictures were able to negotiate a deal with Warner Brothers for the distribution of *The Life of Brian* on the basis of the popularity of the Python group in America, but with Terry Gilliam's sci-fi fantasy *Time Bandits* they had to resort to the desperate expedient of distributing the film themselves. The 'creative accountancy' indulged in by the majors²⁶ in some way makes this a preferable alternative—*Time Bandits* was actually a remarkable success, grossing eighteen million dollars—but the risks involved are consider-

Time Bandits—
17,950,000 dollars;
Tommy—
17,787,000 dollars;
Bridge on the River Kwai—17,195,000 dollars; *Tom Jones*—16,950,000 dollars; *Oliver*—16,800,000 dollars; *Lawrence of Arabia*—16,700,000 dollars; *Midnight Express*—15,400,000 dollars; *The Guns of Navarone*—13,000,000 dollars; *The Elephant Man*—12,010,000 dollars; *The French Lieutenant's Woman*—11,167,912 dollars; *Life of Brian*—10,400,000 dollars; *Alfie*—8,500,000 dollars; *Georgie Girl*—7,600,000 dollars. Not all the Bond films have been included. See *Variety*, January 12, 1983.

²⁶ The classic example of 'creative accountancy' is quoted by Jeremy Tunstall and David Walker in *Media Made in California*, New York 1981, p 65: *Love at First Bite*, made by Melvin Simon Productions for 3.3 million dollars, brought in a box office gross of 19.4 million dollars, but after 'mini-major' Filmways (since taken over by Orion) had deducted their distribution fees and expenses the film showed a loss of 299,959 dollars.

²⁷ Though only after the Hollywood majors and Rank/EMI had persistently turned it down. Goldcrest, who put up most of the money, is a film finance company drawing funds from such unlikely sources as the National Union of Mineworkers Pension Fund, Royal Doulton, Madame Tussauds, The Post Office Superannuation Fund, Pearson Longman and an assortment of merchant banks.

²⁸ *Variety*, January 12, 1983.

able. Handmade spent well over five million dollars on its marketing campaign, more, in fact, than the production cost of the film, and independent companies generally act with more caution. Though their dominance is now less obvious, a deal with the American majors remains a necessary fact of life for most British producers hoping to get their films shown in the American market. Richard Attenborough, for example, side-stepped the usual sources of film finance for his long-cherished project, *Gandhi*²⁷, but the need for effective world-wide marketing led to the film's distribution by Columbia.

The shrinkage of the British theatrical market has meant that at least some form of distribution in America is now essential for all but low-budget productions. *Alien*, which grossed 45 million dollars in America, brought in only £153,344 in Britain, and though this is an extreme case, more representative examples such as *Chariots of Fire* (29,600,000 dollars in the US, 3,030,952 dollars in the UK) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, (11,167,912 dollars in the US, 2,027,967 dollars in the UK) demonstrate sufficiently impressively the attractions of the American market.²⁸

The need to appeal to an audience outside Britain has led to fears of a cultural sell-out, that British films would achieve success in America only by shedding their British identity. There is an element of parochial snobbery here; if film is to continue as a mass art then, with shrinking national audiences it must inevitably cut across cultural boundaries. The result is not necessarily bland and anonymous film-making, and in this context the failure of Lew Grade's cynically 'mid-Atlantic' production programme is cheering. One can have reservations about films like *Chariots of Fire* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, but their success in Britain should indicate how little their faults have to do with an overweening desire to appeal to America.

Ever since 1927, the first signs of a boom have encouraged British producers to spend recklessly in the hope of earning bonanza profits. With the success of *Chariots of Fire* and *Gandhi*, the British film industry seems poised on the verge of another wave of unrealistic optimism. One can only hope that, with the demise of the old Rank/EMI duopoly and the beneficent integration between film and television industries which Channel 4 has helped to bring about, this time things might be different.

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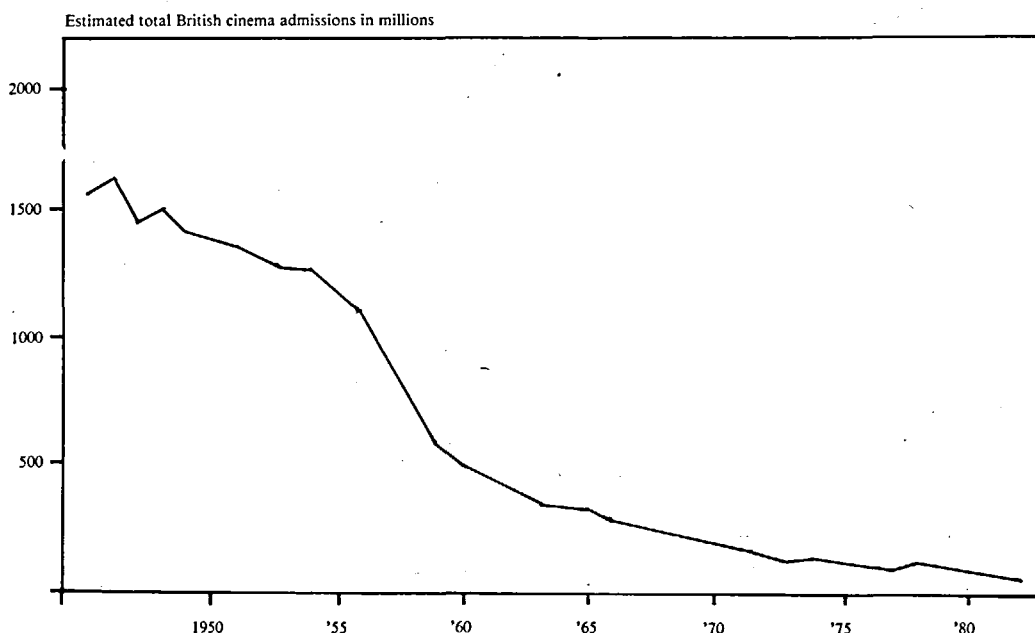
CINEMA-GOING, GOING, GONE?

SIMON BLANCHARD CHARTS THE
DECLINE AND FALL OF UK EXHIBITION

¹ *Hansard*, March
12, 1942, London,
HMSO.

WHEN WAR WAS DECLARED at the beginning of September 1939 there was a widespread expectation that Germany would immediately begin bombing raids. As a result, the government ordered the closing down of all places of entertainment – including cinemas – and prohibited ‘all large gatherings for purposes of entertainment and amusement whether outdoor or indoor’.

Such a complete blackout of cultural life soon proved unworkable: a general re-opening was authorised by September 15. Shrugging off the lost earnings, cinemas went on to play a major part in the war effort. By 1942 Herbert Morrison, the Home Secretary, was explaining to the House of Commons the Coalition government’s belief that ‘... within reason, popular entertainments act as a lubricant rather than a brake to the war machine...’¹



And vice-versa. Cinema attendances rose, reaching a peak of 1,635 million for 1946. Had it not been for post-war controls on building, the number of cinemas might well have passed the 5,000 mark. The Chamberlain government's nervous introduction of a 'brief intermission' at the box office in the Autumn of 1939 had, by this time, been all but forgotten by a business that did well out of the War.²

In 1983 exhibitors are contemplating the prospects of a second black-out, this time of a more permanent kind. Since 1946 the trend in cinema attendances has been one of almost unbroken decline. The Department of Trade's estimate of total admissions in 1982 was 63.69 million, about 3.5 per cent of the 1946 figure. Moreover, although the number of screens (i.e. the auditoria) has not dropped quite as dramatically – down by about two thirds from the 4,709 screens in 1946 to 1,484 at the end of 1982 – the total seating capacity of these venues has shrunk very severely, to around 600,000 (about 15 per cent of the 1950 figure)³.

The point has now been reached where the future for cinemas in Britain is very *unlikely* to resemble the past, only a little bit worse. Should attendances continue to drop at their present rate of around 25 per cent a year⁴, the process of steady but stately decline, which has been the sector's face since the early '60s, can be expected to accelerate into complete collapse. 'Collapse' is, of course, a relative term in this context. Cinema going is not likely to disappear *totally*, but on present policies it could well end up confined to the larger city centres (especially London) and a small fringe of cinephiles by the mid-'80s. What seems unlikely to survive, in these circumstances, is any claim that cinemas still have to be considered as a significant cultural force enjoying broad popular support.

It is worth stressing that this fate – whatever precise form it takes – will not have been the product of any loss of interest in films. Films have probably never been so popular as they are today. More of them are being watched, and in greater variety, than ever before. Unfortunately for cinemas this viewing now largely takes place via the TV screen. It can be categorised under two headings:

1. **Films on TV.** It has been reckoned that the cost to the average viewer of receiving BBC or ITV broadcasts is about two pence per hour, which is about the same as the cost of the set.⁵ The British Film and TV Producers Association have calculated that in 1981 BBC and ITV broadcast a total of 951 films.⁶ To see, for example, *Star Wars* in a cinema or on TV is to pay for two quite different experiences, differences well-explored over the last few years. Even so, given such a mass of very low cost 'films on TV', it is scarcely surprising that, for the majority of the population, the rival attractions of these two contexts for viewing films have weighed in TV's favour. (In retrospect, TV's self-interested and relentless reduction of 'cinema' into 'films' has the character of an ironic revenge. Prior to the outbreak of War the BBC's TV service was an expensive and still experimental toy, available only to the 20,000 viewers within range of the Alexandra Palace signal. Early in the morning of September 1 the Germans entered Poland. Later the same day, as

² See Terence Kelly and others, *A Competitive Cinema*, chapter 2, London, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1966.

³ 1982 figures supplied by Department of Trade Films Branch. See also Kelly, *op cit*, and *Business Monitor MA2 – Cinemas 1981*, London, HMSO.

⁴ Estimated total admissions for 1981 were 85.92 million.

⁵ Calculated from the cost of advertising expenditure, license fee and set rental/purchase. See Andrew Ehrenberg and Patrick Barwise, *How Much Does UK Television Cost?*, London Business School, 1982.

⁶ See the British Film and Television Producers Association, *Annual Report 1981-82*, London, 1982.

the evacuation of civilians began, the TV service was shut down. It stayed shut down until 1946.)

2. **Video.** For a time, in the 1970s, it looked to some commentators as though cinemas had begun to find a stable minority position alongside broadcast TV: annual attendances went up (in 1974 and 1978) for the first time since the late 1940s. However, this slight levelling off was not sustained, and the downward spiral continued. Although clearly not the only factor at work, part of this failure to prevent further decline can be accounted for by the rapid rise in the number of video-cassette recorders (VCRs):

Date	VCRs in Great Britain	Percentage of Households
December 1980	0.5 million	2.5%
December 1981	1.5 million	7.5%
December 1982	3.2 million	15.9%
December 1983*	5.0 million	24.9%
December 1984*	6.5-7 million	34%

*estimate/Source: *The Economist*, February 1983.

As with so many 'facts' about the video business, 'trade intelligence' remains divided about the breakdown of VCR use between 'time-shift' (recording TV programmes, especially films, to watch later) and the viewing of pre-recorded cassettes. However, the proportion of time spent on pre-recorded 'software' is generally agreed to be increasing, even if time-shift use remains predominant. According to the British Market Research Bureau there were 96 million transactions of rental of pre-recorded tapes (including illegal copies) in the UK in 1982: virtually all of this will have been feature films. (In a sample week – April 11-18, '83 – all the titles in the *Video Business* Top 40 Chart were films. The demand for cookery/gardening type tapes seems to be negligible.) A cautious assumption of two persons viewing each cassette still suggests that the audience for films via VCR-TV is now much larger than that for films in cinemas. Even allowing for the 'guesstimatory' quality of many of the findings about video, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this extension of TV's potential is in the process of systematically demolishing what remains of cinema-going's social and cultural base.

Given that the story telling role of cinema and TV screens have been roughly reversed, does it matter if cinemas do almost disappear? And if it does, what can be done to prevent this outcome?

Readers of *Screen* do not need an extensive rehearsal of the basic arguments for cinema exhibition. They are drawn from two overlapping themes: the cinema's place as part of the wider mosaic of public cultural life, as an arena with the potential for collective enjoyment and debate; secondly, the need to keep cinemas open as part of a strategy of preserv-

ing and extending spaces and options outside the domestic and largely familial context and assumptions of TV.⁷ In passing it is important to add that these lines of argument can get flattened into the false and undiscriminating polarity:

cinema = public = good

TV = private = bad

This simple dichotomy has to be avoided. The problem is not how to choose *between* cinemas and TV (we can opt for both), but rather how to develop what is worthwhile in the potential of each context while recognising that cinemas are currently most in need of attention. In considering the prospects for cinemas it seems plain enough that the detailed policies needed (and the money to back them up), will only emerge from an extended process of public discussion. In conclusion, I would suggest that the following points can be made:

1. It is neither possible nor desirable to think in terms of a return to what could be called 'the spirit of '46'. Support for cinema-going has to amount to much more than devising a life support system for 'actually existing cinemas'. If the publicly shared viewing of large moving images is to continue, it will have to work out for itself a carefully chosen space amongst the developing array of new communications media. More particularly, it will have to address the rapidly growing dominance of all kinds of electronic imaging, digitally encoded or otherwise. Bluntly, as things stand, the future looks like being opto-electronic, not photo-chemical.

2. It is important to emphasise yet again that the interests and room for manoeuvre of film producers and exhibitors may overlap, but they are not identical. Film producers now have several other outlets besides cinemas: if exhibitors and their audiences confine themselves to 'waiting for Goldcrest', for some mythical product-led boom from mainstream sources to solve their problems, then nothing will be achieved. Exhibition policy has to wrench itself out of passive confinement 'downstream' from Wardour Street. Cinemas have the potential – already fulfilled to varying degrees in some independent venues – to construct alternative cultural and political bases for themselves.

3. Nothing has illustrated the potential importance of a reconstructed exhibition sector more clearly than the recent resurgence of 'Great British' chauvinism in discussions about the future of film production in the UK. Here has been ample evidence – if it is still needed – of the continuity-in-bankruptcy of thinking about film policy inside the English ruling bloc and its ideologists. When the Association of Independent Producers tell us that

*Film is uniquely able to project the British way of life and reflect British values and culture abroad. Such exposure by helping to maintain awareness and appreciation of Britain among her trading partners and political allies vitally enhances the nation's global image...*⁸

⁷ See Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-social Family*, London, Verso Editions, 1982.

⁸ *Recommendations to the Government on the future of British film production*, Association of Independent Producers, London, 1983.

⁹ See Philip Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, especially chapter 3, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

¹⁰ See J R Sargent, 'Tourism as an Export Industry in the UK', *Midland Bank Review* Spring 1981.

¹¹ See his *Politics and Letters*, pp 37-8, London, New Left Books, 1979.

¹² See Kingsley Martin, *Editor*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969.

¹³ A small example: '... Mr Puttnam has an axe to grind. His latest film, *Local Hero*, is set in the most picturesque parts of the Western Islands of Scotland. On the advice of Mr Sproat, who was much impressed by the pro-British and tourist spin-off of the film *Chariots of Fire*, Mr Puttnam invited the British Tourist Authority's US marketing men to a special screening to see how the film and the BTA could work together. "I told them that the film company would put up a dollar for every dollar they wanted to spend on promoting Scotland through the movie," Mr

what we are witnessing is not so much a bad case of post-Falklands dementia as the attempt—in utterly changed conditions—to revive a rhetoric of 'national projection' which had a strictly limited purchase on State policy even when it was first formulated, half a century ago.⁹

4. In this respect, the two broad, strategic options for cinemas are clearly visible.

The first is to remain in a state of subordination to what can be called 'cine-tourism'. As the Economic Advisor to the Midland Bank recently noted, in a discussion of the tourist trade:

*Although it is not in the position of an extractive industry exploiting natural resources which are ultimately exhaustible, its productive assets are to a substantial extent incapable of being expanded with the growth of demand. Many of the things which tourists come to see and hope to enjoy, such as historic buildings or areas of great natural beauty, have a capacity which cannot be replicated; and the quality of the tourists' experience is liable to decline in proportion to their numbers. Two hundred tourists in Westminster Abbey are worse from the tourist's point of view than one hundred, although there may be marginal benefits to the restoration fund; and the quality cannot be maintained by building another Abbey...*¹⁰

The tourist operator's dilemma has long been the cinema's opportunity. Since Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897, if not before, exhibitors have cooperated with producers to meet the demand for jingoistic spectacle. The basic contours of this spectacular dream-world 'Britain' were most acridly described by Kingsley Martin—editor of the *New Statesman*—in his autobiography. In September 1937, on a visit to the Paris international exhibition, he was struck by the splendour of the German and Soviet pavilions. In contrast, the British pavilion, which Raymond Williams was also to later recall as being 'peculiarly contemptible'¹¹ was remembered by Martin as

*housed in something that looked like a white packing case. When you went in the first thing you saw was a cardboard Chamberlain fishing in rubber waders and, beyond, an elegant pattern of golf-balls, a frieze of tennis rackets, polo sets, riding equipment, natty dinner jackets and, by a pleasant transition, agreeable pottery and textiles, books finely printed and photographs of the English countryside. I stared in bewilderment. Could this be England? If so, it was the England of the cultivated rich or perhaps the England foreseen by Bernard Shaw when Britain's economy would depend on the export of chocolate creams. An entirely upper-class England. Almost all the photographs were of pastoral scenes and old churches, not a single factory chimney, not a gun or battleship or aeroplane, not a hint that Britain had a colonial empire, not a sign anywhere of a proletariat. A nice England, unlike any that had existed or could exist...*¹²

This type of 'chocolate cream' fantasy world has, if anything, acquired further, more virulent, strains in the 1980s, such that is tempting to speculate on the existence of an inverse law connecting economic collapse and political sclerosis with an ideological inflation of imagery.¹³

The other strategic option is for cinemas to begin confronting 'cine-tourism' and the thinking it feeds off and amplifies. It can be unpicked and dis-organised. There is no better place to start than in the cinemas themselves...

Puttnam said yesterday... "But first of all, they said the film was vulgar. Second, they said it had no castles in it, so it was not presenting the image of Scotland they wanted to promote"...'
(Report in the *Guardian*, March 8, 1983).

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Production still for *Chariots of Fire* – a classic of 'cine-tourism'.

THE SINGLE PLAY: FROM REITHIAN REVERENCE TO COST- ACCOUNTING AND CENSORSHIP

BY CARL GARDNER AND JOHN WYVER

¹ Troy Kennedy Martin, "Nats Go Home", *Encore* vol 11 no 2, March-April 1964; Troy Kennedy Martin and others, *Contrast* Winter 1964-5, Spring 1965, Winter 1965-Spring 1966.

² cf *Edinburgh International Television Festival programme* (1977).

³ Troy Kennedy Martin, *op cit.*

IN 1964 a debate raged in *Encore*, *Contrast* and elsewhere¹ between Troy Kennedy Martin, John Russell Taylor, James MacTaggart and others about the question of *style* in TV drama—'naturalism' versus various forms of non-naturalistic drama. Three years ago at Edinburgh that debate could still find an echo through the contributions of John McGrath, Dennis Potter, Raymond Williams, Clive Goodwin and others². From the perspective of 1980 such a debate about alternative directions for TV drama (and in particular the single play or film) seems barely credible, particularly as the existence of the single play in any form is in serious doubt.

Troy Kennedy Martin's words from his article "'Nats" Go Home'³ bear repeating to see how far we've come: 'Drama, even bad drama, carries commercial prestige over here; the nature of competition for national networking among the independents demands the continuation of major drama spots.' Now, as we know, there are no regular single play spots on ITV, the total number of single plays has declined drastically over the last fifteen years and the audiences for the ones which remain appear less and less concerned.

We do not come to bury the form, nor to read the last respectful rights over its recumbent corpse; but neither do we have great hopes of resuscitating it. Our intention is rather different from recent funeral orations. First we wish to sketch in some of the history of the single play and the various determining factors for its current demise, including the broader social and political context outside TV which bore on the form; second to argue the case why the form was and still is historically important and why it ought to be/have been more fiercely defended. In conclusion we hope that our arguments, though by no means fully worked out, will add up to more than a fairly parochial discussion about one narrow strand of television, for one of the central problems with past debates is that they

have continually assumed a hermetic, self-fulfilling nature for the form. Instead we think that by an examination of the conditions of a unique microcosm of TV it is possible to approach a diagnosis and the beginnings of an analysis of the current state of television going into the 1980s.

The history of the single play falls into three phases: the post-war Reithian phase, which lasted roughly until the late '50s; the transitional phase, dominated by Sidney Newman, from the late '50s until the beginning of the '70s; and the present phase currently dribbling to a conclusion, which one could dub the era of cost-effectiveness.

The first phase, primarily under the aegis of the BBC, was one of the last sustained gasps of a paternalistic Reithian project to bring 'the best of British culture' to a grateful and eager audience – a mission of middle-class enlightenment. Thus in its early days TV drama picked up the predominant patterns, concerns and style of both repertory theatre and radio drama (as well as many of their personnel, with their distinct training and working practices) and consisted of televised stage plays, 'faithfully' and tediously broadcast from the theatre, or reconstructed in the studio, even down to intervals, prosceniums and curtains. Such an approach, which takes the television process itself as transparent, almost by definition precluded any innovation of TV style or any attempt to develop a specifically televisual form for small-screen drama. On the other hand the uniqueness of each production was recognised and valued, but any merit such production had was derived from elsewhere, rather than from TV.

In social terms the principal obstacles to the infinite dissemination of 'high culture' to the masses were seen as inadequate communication and lack of access and opportunity, both of which short-comings could now be overcome by transmission into millions of homes through the window of the television screen. Cultural privilege was supposedly in the process of being abolished – education and enlightenment were for all. Television was the domain of the middle classes, assured in their mission of guiding those less fortunate towards the values of a well-established, 'classless' culture. Confident in this mission and supported by a rapidly expanding consumer boom, television (and particularly the single play) seemed simply to entertain and enlighten many while bothering very few.

From 1958 onwards Sidney Newman and those he encouraged changed all that. The British ABC-TV company, casting around desperately for prestige, brought Newman over from Canada where he had built an honoured reputation in live TV drama. He immediately began to implement the policy which had brought him success at CBC and with NBC in New York – original plays by contemporary dramatists, written for the medium and concerned with issues of the day. 'I said we would have an original play policy with plays that were going to be about the very people who owned TV sets – which is really a working-class audience,'⁴ he remembers. Helped by protective scheduling, Newman produced a run of immensely popular, stimulating and often controversial work which employed a variety of styles.

⁴ John Wyver, 'TV's Dramaturge – an Interview with Sydney Newman', *Time Out*, April 6-12, 1979, pp 13-14.

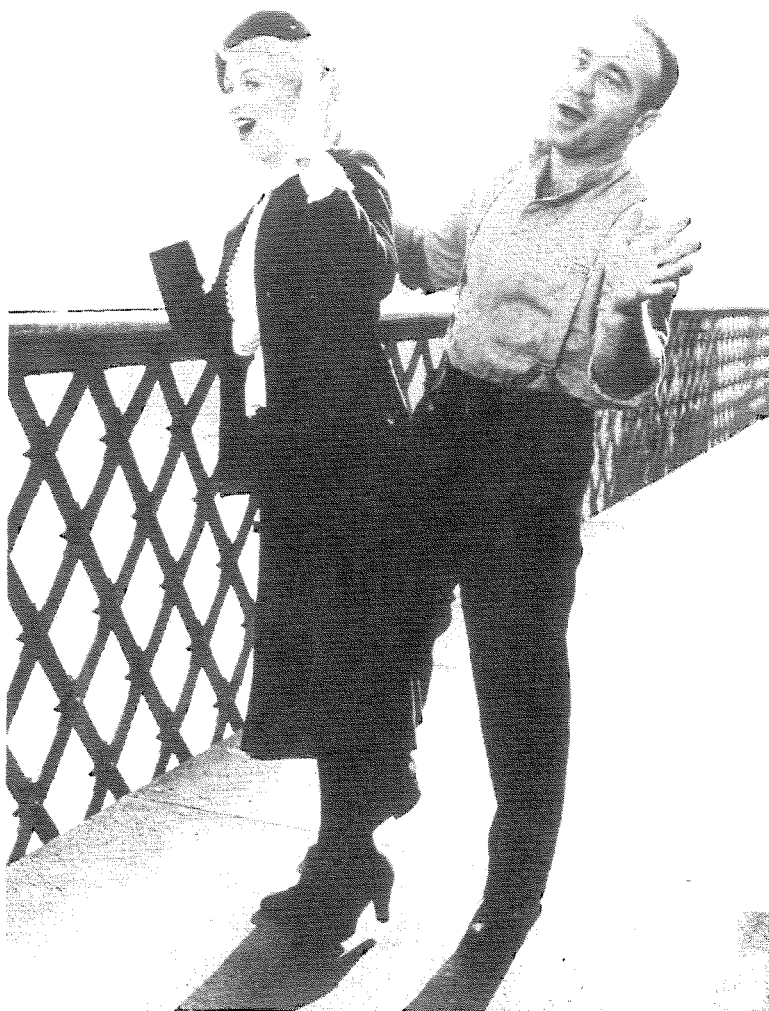


The Wednesday Play,
1966: *Cathy Come Home*.

⁵ John Wyver, op cit.

In early 1963 Newman took his policies to the BBC, starting *The Wednesday Play* with producers Tony Garnett and the late James MacTaggart. 'They operated without any reference to me really,' he recalls. 'I only dictated the basic terms. I said I want you to concentrate on the turning points of English society and then I gave them the money and left them alone. And so *Cathy Come Home*, *Up the Junction*—all those real breakthroughs.'⁵

His stimulus was part of, and supported by, a wider change in British culture, particularly in the theatre. New subjects and new authors were reviving the theatrical tradition and TV, still very unsure of its cultural status, wanted to be able to match the theatre. Thus when it seemed that in certain of its playwrights, TV could find its own 'artists', the medium quickly latched on to supporting them in every way. In other areas too challenging work was encouraged and restraining institutions and legis-



The 'progressive'
drama series:
Pennies from Heaven.

lation (the Lord Chamberlain, obscenity laws) were taken on and topped. TV's single play drew strength from these movements and was bolstered by them.

In addition the companies, and the BBC in particular, had made enormous capital investments in studio space which had to be filled. The idea of the series was only half-developed, though obviously certain soap operas and thrillers were staple parts of the schedule. But it still seemed that the single play was the best way to capitalise on the studios and so they were turned out regularly for well-established slots.

Newman's influence carried the single play through the '60s, but gradually its dominance began to slip. By the end of that decade economic factors were beginning to assert themselves, both inside TV and outside. Undoubtedly a harsher economic climate could not but reflect itself in harsher political/aesthetic conditions within the institutions of

broadcasting—it is no accident that the liberal era of Hugh Carleton Greene at the BBC should have been replaced by the solidly conservative aegis of his successors.

And the wind of change was felt most sharply at the BBC. Inflation began slowly to outstrip the Corporation's fixed revenue and the licence fee fell more and more out of phase with costs—from being an other-worldly institution where vulgar things like money were somehow slightly sordid considerations compared with the fondly-paraded 'enrichment' of the cultural life of the nation, television slipped inexorably into the era of 'cost-effectiveness'. Slowly accountancy, rather than 'creativity', became the most important talent. Nowhere was this more important than in the single play.

The reasons for the decline of the single play through this period of development towards cost-effective television can be grouped loosely under the headings of the economic and ideological, though these factors interact at different levels. At its most basic level a single drama, on tape or on film, lasting one hour costs considerably more than an hour of series drama. This is because a large number of fixed costs, like scenery design and construction, costumes, planning and casting costs, can be spread in a series over the budget for six or thirteen parts. One-offs always start from scratch, both for the production team and the cast who, in a series, need less rehearsal time because they become familiar with the characters.

This strictly economic pressure against the single play is reinforced by the increasing role played by scheduling. Although ITV did not have the same economic problems as the BBC, the search for profits from advertising, the need to 'hook' and hold an audience in competition with two BBC channels, led to more and more reliance on the US-originated 'science' of scheduling—the seamless, predictable structuring of a whole evening's viewing to maximise and maintain an audience. Within such a policy, interruptions or disruptions of the programme-flow—in other words anything which stands out starkly from what surrounds it—would naturally be seen as a negative feature to be eliminated. The single play through a whole series of characteristics—its unpredictable shifts in style, content and personnel from week to week; its discreteness and 'strangeness' from the comfortably repetitive programmes around it; its internal integrity and completeness of its meanings—thus became a headache for the ratings- and advertising-conscious scheduler. Kennedy Martin's argument from 'prestige' had lost out. This undoubtedly played a part in the decline of the form.

Series on the other hand are obviously easier to schedule, filling the same neatly-timed hole for a comfortable number of weeks. They are designed from the start to fit in with fixed points in the schedule (like the 9 o'clock 'watershed' and *News at Ten*) and, because the audience is led back to them week after week, they build and attain far better ratings than single dramas, even when these are forced into anthology slots. And exactly because they are expected, indeed conceived to collect these high ratings, there is always the pressure on them to opt for the safe, the predictably popular, the tried-and-tested.

Indirect economic factors are important too, for series, unlike single plays, attract buyers and co-production money from overseas, and particularly from the States. Single dramas are seen as too parochial for foreign countries, where national 'idiosyncracies' can be coped with better over the extended time of a series. More importantly, sponsoring corporations, like Mobil and Exxon, want advertising prestige from their support of 'good' television. A British drama series, particularly a 'prestigious' and non-controversial one, like *Lillie* or *Edward and Mrs Simpson*, running for weeks and weeks, is the perfect artifact for image-building. Period pieces will often celebrate exactly the values of confidence and stability with which corporations want to be associated. In addition the overheads on selling single plays are far more for groups like BBC Enterprises or Thames International when each drama has to be approached separately. A single episode successfully marketed will carry another twelve with it without any further effort.

The success of *The Forsyte Saga* was crucial in establishing this pattern which was repeated with LWT's *Upstairs, Downstairs*. *Upstairs, Downstairs* is crucial in another important respect for it was with the Sunday night scheduling of this series that the ITV companies persuaded the then Independent Television Authority to drop their statutory single play slot. Undoubtedly if the ITA had been more farsighted and insistent in its defence of this slot, a certain space could have been maintained for the one-off play for far longer. But by the end of the '60s, after more than a dozen years of experience of the ITA, the ITV companies were realising that far from independently upholding rigorous broadcasting standards, the Authority was willing to comply with the economic requirements of the franchise-holders.

Overseas sales and co-production money is now a growing and necessary part of the BBC's revenue. Given the BBC's fixed, or indeed shrinking annual budget, it is one variable area of revenue which can be increased during the year. This is different from ITV which can put up the ad rates—in addition to relying on increased sales by Thames International etc. However as soon as this process became more pronounced, it had important repercussions. TV programmes began to take on a different status—they became commodities, to be bought and sold on the open market as discrete objects, with a fixed exchange value. From being a producer of an abstract series of programmes—art, ideology, cultural exchange, information, call it what you will—for a British audience which didn't directly *buy* them in the strict sense of the term, the BBC and ITV companies moved more and more towards commodity-production. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the increasingly common production of made-for-TV movies, mostly undistinguished mid-Atlantic product like *Dirty Money* and *Charlie Muffin*, tailored for overseas markets and financed in ways which avoid the government levy touching their profits.

This process—whereby programmes gradually change their status, becoming discrete commodities to be bought and sold in the market place, as opposed to remaining essentially a much less commercially-oriented moment within a society's 'cultural exchange'—has profound

effects, both on the programmes themselves and on the conditions under which they are produced. Firstly, to determine the cost of the programme, so that it can be sold at a profit, entails a much stricter cost-accounting and budgeting for each individual project – rather than being averaged across departments. Personnel who previously worked with a certain degree of highly-valued ‘freedom’ from the market, in a ‘creative’ environment, became much more part of a production-process increasingly comparable with any other. This cost-effectiveness, tighter budgeting, etc. is a growing feature of TV production.

The second effect is that the programmes themselves become much more tailored to the requirements of the eventual buyer, than the indigenous audience who (in most cases) see the programme first. The TV companies would deny this but it is a law of economics that those who put up the capital tend to determine what shall be produced.

But by now, in any case, things have gone an important and dangerous step further – and one which bears on some of the supposedly fundamental principles of the British public service TV system. In the early days the TV companies produced for the home market and then cast around for a foreign buyer as a sort of bonus. Now with the advent of co-production, capital gets in there first and has a large say in what shall be produced, at the expense of the needs of the domestic audience. Mick Pilsworth quotes Peter Lord, Sales Manager of BBC Enterprises (itself, since August 1979, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the BBC which doesn’t just sell programmes but now invests its own profits back into co-production with the BBC): ‘At one time we never took an interest in a programme until it was actually made, and then we’d try and sell it. Now we hear about things when they’re working titles. We’re all in constant touch all the time and they’re much more willing to listen to us.’⁶

This process obviously applies to other investors. The first episode of the co-production *The Voyage of Charles Darwin* got a little further than planning, but on viewing it in finished form, the US co-production partners demanded that the first episode be totally re-cut, to include romantic, exciting sea-footage from episode five, in order to hook the US audience before the habitual ‘channel-hop’. For better or worse this destroyed the chosen chronological form in which it was conceived. The ‘creative process’ had become subservient to the market.

The effects of this process on the content of TV drama are both predictable and observable – on the one hand the loss of cultural specificity already referred to or the production of a mythologised British ‘history’ and ‘tradition’, which we have already observed in the continued obsession with costume-drama series, classic serials etc. In strictly domestic economic terms these are expensive but become a ‘good investment’ when guaranteed foreign sales are involved. This marketing of British culture as a televisual commodity has become almost a corollary of the British tourist industry and fulfills a similar role in international terms.⁷

Returning now to the decline of the single play, let us consider the ideological reasons involved. These are undoubtedly more difficult to

⁶ Michael Pilsworth, ‘Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime’, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1979-80, pp 51-53.

⁷ cf Mike Poole, ‘Englishness for Export’, *Time Out*, March 7-13, 1980, p 13.

pinpoint but it is clear that the single play's decline, in both numerical and 'creative' terms cannot be solely accounted for by economic factors. While the single play is (or has been) prestigious, it is also threatening, for reasons we will develop below. It can be allusive and is always more difficult than most TV forms for executives to control. So as the country moves from the confident period of seemingly unlimited growth in the '60s, into the harsher, tougher economic decline of the '70s and '80s, television, pressured by the state, economic exigencies and specific organisations like the National Viewers and Listeners Association, inevitably becomes more conservative and the single play and those responsible for its creation are allowed less and less freedom.

The constriction of the possible has various manifestations, the most easily identifiable of which are the appointment of drama executives and censorship. Even if the '80s equivalent of Sidney Newman was working in the theatre or television today, it's certain that he or she would not be allowed the freedom to develop drama in a comparable way. Instead the drama departments of the 'Big Five' TV companies are headed by ratings-and cost-conscious directors. The BBC takes months and months to find a head of Plays, so apparent is it to many 'creative' people that the constraints on the post are now enormous. Equally many producers centrally concerned with the problems we are discussing now become disillusioned with their role and return to directing or the theatre (David Jones, Richard Eyre), while others are brutally pruned from the institutions (W Stephen Gilbert).

Censorship has been discussed endlessly at this Festival in recent years, and will undoubtedly be raised again. Most of what Clive Goodwin wrote in 1977 is still vitally relevant, perhaps even more so now⁸. Enumeration of the many banned dramas is probably superfluous but examining the full pattern it is clear how arbitrary the instances have been (and undoubtedly will be, with the consistent exception of Ireland), suggesting nothing so much as a half-thought out, half-heartedly applied reining-in of the freedom granted to or won by writers, directors and producers in the '60s and early '70s.

So, threatened on every side, the single play can look forward to its most difficult decade yet. But why is it important? Why should it be defended? It must be stressed that our concern for the single play does not stem from a belief that it is a timelessly valid form which is inherently good or culturally valuable. It is important now because for economic, institutional and ideological reasons linked to those discussed above, it offers the most potentially productive area of the medium for what we will call 'progressive television'. Note that this doesn't mean simply 'creative' television or 'art'. But before we develop this, we must make explicit our basic understanding of the medium which opposes the notions behind the overall theme of this conference.

Television does not in any sense 'reflect the real world'. Television is not a 'mirror' which 'reflects'; even in a distorted form, an objective world existing apart from the medium. Television, along with other media and institutions helps *create* that real world, ordering our experi-

⁸ Clive Goodwin, 'Censorship and Drama 1' *Edinburgh International Television Festival programme* (1977), pp 37-39.

ence in particular ways, suggesting and imposing patterns to make sense of seemingly disparate events and happenings. Television helps construct the social world. It provides society with a series of images and representations which shape and form our understanding of society and the individual's place within it (or, alternatively, on the edge of it). Television, along with other institutions working to similar ends, holds society together through a consensual ordering of experience.

Most of the time this 'real world' created by television is simply a repetition and reinforcement of a consensus image. Television's representations work to provide support for 'common sense' and 'moderate' ways of understanding the world. Challenges to these ways are continually marginalised or suppressed. This operation is a complex and subtle one, conditioned by the relations which exist between the broadcasting organisations, the state and capital. For our argument it is important only to understand that this means that every frame, every minute of television, is political, offering support for one set of ideas even while hiding behind the myth of 'objectivity'.

The importance of the single play lies precisely in the potential which it offers for challenging, breaking open and exposing this continued reinforcement of the consensus view. All other TV forms are able to do this too, of course; within the combined constraints of the sitcom and soap opera *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* works insidiously against television's recreation of the *status quo*; a documentary like *Creggan* by Michael Whyte and Mary Holland can explode consensus ideas and images of the war in the North of Ireland; and a serial like *Gangsters* can violently tear apart the clichés and common concerns of action shows so as to lay bare television's operations. Television programmes which operate in comparable ways we will define as 'progressive'.

Yet of all television forms accepted today the single drama probably offers the most potential for this. Unlike other forms, drama is not bound by obligations to 'fairness' and 'impartiality'. Unlike series and serials, the single play does not have to win a large audience, so it can take risks, in subject matter and style. Also unlike continuing drama it is not bound by rigid conventions of narrative, by given situations and characters. Further as W Stephen Gilbert points out: 'the form offers the possibility of individuals *outside* the broadcasting institutions initiating pieces of television'. And as he continues: 'Plays are a different kind of programme. They are ambiguous; they are resonant; they seem to advocate; they do not put the opposite viewpoint; they are unorthodox, even heretical. By the time the scheduler has run through these worries, he is talking about subversion.'⁹

Indeed he may well be, but there is little (short of direct censorship) that the scheduler or executive can do. For the single play is still seen as the realm of The Artist. Television playwrights (along with a very few directors) are really the only creatures working within the medium to be recognised as such. This has much to do with the text-centered heritage of our culture which is still rooted firmly in the twin traditions of classic drama and the nineteenth century novel. The writer's text is always reasonably sacred, even to the extent of various protective clauses being

⁹ W Stephen Gilbert, 'The Television Play—Outside the Consensus', *Screen Education* no 35, Summer 1980, pp 35-44.

included in contracts. In our strange contradictory culture The Artist is someone special who must be pampered and pandered to, not least by a still not-quite-respectable medium like television. Within the limits of respectability, it doesn't really matter what The Artist is doing, and whether we understand it or not – Artistic Expression is Important.

Paradoxically then one of the most out-dated and restrictive ways of understanding cultural production, derived from nineteenth century Romanticism – that of foregrounding the individual author as punctual producer of meaning – still permits some of TV's most progressive work to slip through, despite increasing incidents of interference and censorship. Disguise it as Art and more or less anything goes. We do not have space to elaborate our differences with this conception of Art but would refer the reader briefly to Raymond Williams, at Edinburgh in 1977, for a sketch of a more satisfactory, dynamic view: 'The actual production process is a complex of material properties, the process of signification between them, social relations between producers and audiences and the inherent and consequent selection of content.'¹⁰

The legacy of the author-centred view in TV is enormously important and undoubtedly contributes to the continued tolerance, even welcome, for progressive writers like Dennis Potter, Trevor Griffiths and Jim Allen, directors like Ken Loach and Roland Joffe and producers like Tony Garnett and Ken Trodd.

There are however two important counter-arguments to this line of reasoning. Although the single play clearly does offer the most potential for this work, its presentation in slots like *The Wednesday Play* can work against its progressive qualities. Offered for consumption in the same way, week after week, dramas begin to generate expectations of 'weirdness' or 'left-wing bias' which allow audiences to explain to themselves the challenging qualities of dramas and to reassure themselves that these works are television's aberrations (which in a way they are).

Equally our championing of the single play is not meant to suggest that the drama series and serial does not under any circumstances offer the opportunity for progressive work. In the light of *Law and Order*, *Pennies from Heaven* and *Bill Brand*, this would clearly be ridiculous. Writers like G F Newman, Potter and Griffiths obviously recognise the importance of using the forms to develop particular themes, for it offers unique opportunities in its range and openings for subtle changes in arguments, characters and situations. Even the soap opera format can be turned round on itself by works as different as *Mary Hartman* (where the form is broken open) and R W Fassbinder's major *Eight Hours Are Not a Day*. Still almost unseen in this country, Fassbinder's short-lived soap-opera used all the conventions but broke radically with the usual passive, family-centred, politically-unaware characters. Unsurprisingly the West German station which commissioned it in 1974 cancelled it after only five parts.

So what then of the future? Is the form irrevocably lost? And who will defend it – or indeed all other shrinking areas of 'progressive' television faced by the economic, commercial and political pressures of the early 1980s? And in what way can it be defended? Such questions immediately

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, 'Realism and Non-Naturalism I', *Edinburgh International Television Festival programme* (1977), pp 30-31.

raise a host of other problems relating to democratic accountability of the medium, questions of wider control and access and considerations of political tactics and strategy. But the first point to be made is that we believe any reliance on the statutory bodies – the IBA or the BBC Board of Governors – to achieve such a defence, is doomed to failure. They have already demonstrated themselves subservient to the requirements of the commercial companies on the one hand and Tory penny-pinching on the other. What then of the broadcasting unions? They too have precious little tradition of fighting around questions of TV content (with the odd exception of the Association of Cinematographic and Television Technicians over Ireland) and the Association of Broadcasting Staffs' half-hearted, 'respectable' defence of the BBC against the cutbacks (in contrast to the more militant tactics of the Musicians' Union) does not augur well. In particular the ABS permits its members in BBC drama departments to be super-exploited without complaint. And drama personnel themselves seldom rebel about inadequate budgets and impossibly demanding work-schedules, simply because they know that the whole form and its continuance is under threat and its practitioners on the defensive.

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THE SINGLE PLAY: AN AFTERWORD

BY CARL GARDNER AND JOHN WYVER

The preceding article was written at the invitation of the 1980 Edinburgh International Television Festival and was specifically addressed to that gathering and that moment. Three years on, television has experienced several major changes and may be in the process of altering out of all recognition. Our own understandings and concerns have shifted also, so that, although we are pleased that *Screen* has asked to reprint the paper, we feel that it is important to develop the arguments within it and perhaps also to distance ourselves from certain of its assertions. We do, however, despite one shift of emphasis (see below), believe that our historical analysis remains valid.

We similarly feel that the article did provide a reasonably accurate and prescient scenario of the direction that television drama and the medium as a whole would take in the 1980s—despite the varied protestations by practitioners at the time. The most apparent development is the greatly increased dependence of British television, and the BBC in particular, on co-production monies. Almost no major project, in drama, documentary series, arts, wildlife and science programmes is now initiated without the involvement of at least one co-production partner. And one major series, a history of the Jews, was cancelled precisely because no co-production partner was forthcoming.

Perhaps the most overt example of the trend to reliance on co-production and foreign sales was the agreement the BBC reached with the RCA-owned cable company RCTV to supply programmes for their service, The Entertainment Channel, which opened in June 1982. This agreement, now in question after the

failure of the service to attract viewers, was for the BBC to provide a minimum of 200 hours of television a year, thus supposedly netting the Corporation 100 million dollars over ten years.¹

Even more recently, the BBC has entered a joint project with the largest US cable operator, Home Box Office, to produce a programme of British films apparently 'to be scripted by British writers, directed by British directors and have British subjects'². This move is seen by some commentators as an indication that the BBC is considering turning one of its satellite channels into a British Home Box Office service.

In a similar vein, perhaps the most stark example of the recent shift in the 'capital vs art' balance, which confirmed the overturn of Troy Kennedy Martin's 1964 thesis, was the conflict between the PFH production company and London Weekend Television in the summer of 1980. Here a group of major dramas, initiated and partly filmed by prize-winning producer Ken Trodd and writer Dennis Potter (soon after their critical success *Pennies from Heaven*), was ignominiously cancelled by LWT because the projects had gone over budget by £150,000. Such a brutal cost-cutting decision was something new in the commercial TV ecology.

Our strictures on the growth of classic serials and costume dramas have also been more than validated. The six months from October '81 to April '82 saw many examples of a mythologised history and literature dressed up in the best 'authentic' finery that television wardrobe

¹ cf Cheryl Aldridge, 'The BBC Gets Down to Business', *City Limits*, March 5-12, 1982.

² *The Guardian*, March 30, 1983.

126 departments can buy. During that period there were three thematic obsessions in historical drama, none of which bore much direct relation to the issues and concerns of the 1980s. First there were the great historical figures: *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years* (Southern), *I Remember Nelson* (Central), *Nancy Astor* and *The Borgias* (both BBC). Second there were the classic (or not-so-classic) period novels serialised: *Brideshead Revisited* (Granada), *Great Expectations*, Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*, Kipling's *Stalky & Co*, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* and Howard Spring's *Fame is the Spur* (all BBC). The third strand in this persistent recycling of the past was the fascination for World War II and its aftermath, slipping into the 1950s: *Tenko* and *The Bell* (both BBC), *We'll Meet Again* (LWT), *Shine On Harvey Moon* (Central), *Airline* (Yorkshire Television) and *A Kind of Loving* (Granada). On top of all this there was the nineteenth century whisky-dynasty drama, *King's Royal*, from the BBC, plus prestigious period pieces like Schnitzler's infamously over-rated *La Ronde* and Brecht's *Baal*, starring David Bowie and billed by the BBC as *Bowie in Baal* giving a sense of their cultural and promotional priorities.

Perhaps the various elements in the trans-Atlantic formula for maximising overseas sales and investment can best be seen in two particular series – *Nancy Astor* (BBC) and *We'll Meet Again* (LWT). Both exhibit the best credential of all – the 'American connection' writ large. Nancy Astor was an upper-class American who married a British newspaper magnate and became Britain's first woman MP to take her seat in the Commons. She is probably the perfect co-production heroine – glamorous, conservative, rich, genuinely transatlantic and even (in a way) feminist. Stylistically, the series suffered appallingly from the co-production arrangements, which used a US crew for the Stateside location sequences (on film) and a British team for the English episode and all interiors (in studio). The images vacillated wildly between bright, sunlit exteriors, shot in the style of a US mini-series, and the pervasive studio gloom that the BBC deems necessary for anything set prior to World War II.

We'll Meet Again, in evident mimicry of John Schlesinger's feature *Yanks*, concerns the World War II 'invasion' of a Suffolk town by US

troops, and the tensions and romantic liaisons that ensue – as Mike Poole described it in *City Limits*, 'a slick romp through the over-paid, over-sexed and over here routine'. Both series are obsessed with period 'authenticity' via costume and artifact and uncontentiously fixated on the personal dilemmas of their characters, to the detriment of any wider political and social issues which might have been explored. Despite their separation in time and subject, they have much in common, both as carefully calculated television projects and as innocuously individualised visions of history.

On all co-produced projects, BBC executives and programme makers continue to deny the direct influence of the partner, but this position looks increasingly untenable when many programmes include sequences which, if not quite as blatantly as in *Nancy Astor* or *We'll Meet Again*, are still obviously present to appeal to a foreign investor or purchaser. Nor can this 'arm's length' principle hold with the so-called 'reverse co-productions' (such as *The Captain's Doll* and *To the Lighthouse*, both BBC) which are another recent invention. On each of these period dramas an independent production company came to the BBC with a project for which they were seeking additional money. The BBC's contribution in cash and facilities bought the UK transmission rights, but the Corporation did not exercise the once all-important editorial control.

All these tendencies and examples should be seen as elements in what Nicholas Garnham has identified as a radical shift within the international economy of broadcasting from a public service model to the dominance of the market: 'what we are in fact being offered is not a more socially responsive, politically accountable, diverse mode of cultural interchange in the electronic sphere, but on the contrary the expansion of price and profit, of commodity exchange, as the dominating mode or organisation in yet another area of cultural production and consumption, as though this were a new phenomenon. Instead we are witnessing merely the latest phase in a process integral to the capitalist mode of production.'³

³ Nicholas Garnham, 'Public Service Versus the Market', *Screen* Jan/Feb 1983, vol 24 no 1, p 14.

In our earlier essay we suggested both the commoditisation of cultural exchange and the swing away from the principles of Reithian paternalism, which created the original space for fifteen or twenty years of numerous and varied drama productions. What no one was predicting in 1980, however, was that the principles of 'public service' would collapse so rapidly. In the face of a double crisis of the public service institution – an economic one and one of ideological self-legitimation – the BBC is quite clearly responding in the worst possible way, by opening itself up to commercial incorporation and the exigencies of the international market. Obviously this tendency is exacerbated by the policies of Thatcher and Reagan and their deliberate dismantling of the public sector.

This process leaves left critics in the curious position of having to defend and fight to retain a television system which they have spent years attacking for its elitism, paternalism, class-specificity and inaccessibility. In the past two years the debate has become locked in the 'public service' vs 'free market' dichotomy⁴, within which new, more responsive models of television, incorporating some of the positive features of the old Reithian set-up, have been largely precluded. For, as we showed in the 1980 paper, there were very important impulses and advantages in the Reithian system – in particular the attempt to generalise and popularise a range of dramatic, artistic and musical events and styles for a wider audience. It is this diversity and eclecticism, which occasionally opened up spaces for oppositional voices and contradictory meanings, which is threatened in the current wave of commercial homogenisation.

Against this background, it is depressingly predictable to note that the single play has in the last three years become more personal and less concerned with a social canvas. In a discussion of the BBC's drama documentary department, Mike Poole gives a precise identification of this trend: 'it is increasingly to this area of programme-making at the BBC (i.e. drama-documentaries) – and not the drama department proper – that one looks for dramatic treatment of

the larger themes: history, politics, society. True, we've had the brilliantly incisive *Boys from the Blackstuff*, but in the area of the single play particularly, there's been a noticeable return to the personal, the private. The self-enclosed world of Reg Gadney's *Last Love* illustrated this perfectly a few weeks ago; and this week's offering in the *Play for Today* slot, David Hopkins' *Wayne and Albert*, a well-crafted study of a grandfather-grandson relationship, though similarly touching, would seem to confirm the trend.'⁵

Probably only one work from the 1982/3 *Play for Today* season, at least up to the end of April, could be said to have taken on those 'larger themes' – Stephen Poliakoff's *Soft Targets*, which offered an examination of contemporary Britain. Indeed, the shift away from the social and political issues of today may be symbolised in the current discussion at the BBC about whether the title *Play for Today* should be dropped in the autumn. 'The drama department doesn't want to have to make things called play for today,' one senior executive said recently. 'They just want to make plays.'⁶

Partly these shifts reflect changes of personnel, for many of those who fought for the qualities which we identified in our original article have left the large institutions to work as independents, endeavouring to set up feature films or projects for Channel 4's *Film on Four* slot.

More crucial, though, have been the economics of drama. As the overall budget has shrunk, the BBC, for example, has felt that it must continue to do the same number of single plays each year, clinging to the worth of the form. The average budgets have thus had to be cut back and this constraint has encouraged more modest productions with small casts. Or, of course, it has forced producers to look for foreign money to make the lavish period pieces now so common in the single play slot on BBC2.

A further factor relates to a wider cultural shift. In a recent *Voices* programme on Channel 4, David Edgar argued that in the British theatre there had been a significant shift around 1980 away from radical drama engaged with public

⁴ cf the debates at the 1982 Edinburgh International Television Festival; also Brian Wenham (ed), *The Third Age of Broadcasting*, London, Faber & Faber, 1982.

⁵ Michael Poole, 'Prosecution or Persecution?', *The Listener*, March 10, 1983, p 32.

⁶ Conversation with one of the authors.

issues. Drama, he maintained, has become increasingly dominated by a theatre of celebration, such as his own collaboration with the RSC, *Nicholas Nickleby*. Edgar's argument is subtle and detailed and we will not attempt to paraphrase it further, but it raises an important point. Some of those whom we identified at Edinburgh with 'progressive' television had little or no training in the theatre (Tony Garnett, Ken Loach) but many others, particularly writers (Trevor Griffiths, David Hare), undoubtedly did, and their political analysis was often brought into television from the theatre. Television, to a large extent, has always been a parasite of the British stage, and it is not surprising that the shift Edgar perceives is reflected within the BBC's output.

One corollary of these trends has, given our earlier analysis, been most surprising. This is that in the last three years, and directly contrary to our expectations in 1980, television drama has not been subjected to any major overt censorship. Censorship is always difficult to identify precisely, and various forms of self-censorship will always operate within television. But, since *Solid Geometry* in 1979, there appears to have been so single play which has significantly disturbed or upset senior executives. It could be argued that this simply reflects an increasing tolerance, or, on the contrary, a far more effective system of control which does not permit problematic scripts to reach production. Rather, we see the absence as an indirect outcome of the changes we have outlined.

The question remains, nonetheless, who will defend the single play? Although censorship may not be a current threat, with continuing economic encroachments, the problem may seem all the more pertinent. First, however, one footnote to our earlier historical analysis. We perhaps over-estimated the economic determinants of the erosion of the gains of the Newman era at the end of the 1960s. A more important factor may well have been the sudden growth of subsidised fringe and alternative drama groups, where writers found new arenas and new access to working-class audiences. John McGrath's exit from television to found the 7:84 theatre group exemplifies this trend, and there was undoubtedly a general pull working on politicised writers who might otherwise have remained in or been attracted to the medium. (For an excellent discussion of the relationship

between radical theatre and television, and the various strategic debates around both, see Graham Murdock's 'Radical Drama, Radical Theatre'.⁷)

Re-reading our 1980 article has also prompted us to ask whether the single play was, or can be, as important as we suggested. In arguing for its 'progressive' potential we assumed that particular elements can provide complete breaks from the impetus towards consensus of the medium as a whole. But television's continual recreation of that consensus is far more powerful, and immediately seeks to accommodate any awkward meanings which may be offered. So at the most fundamental level, the importance of the single play has been and probably still is over-rated. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that television's operation is complex and often contradictory, and the single play is uniquely sited to exploit these contradictions.

But there is another level at which television drama is held to be important. This is in what is identified as its immediate effect on society or the political order. The example, and perhaps it is the only example, which is always quoted to support this kind of power of drama is *Cathy Come Home*, which supposedly 'created' Shelter and a widespread awareness of the problems of the homeless. If the single play ever did have such force (and that has only been assumed, never demonstrated), then that can no longer be the case. As television has proliferated and fragmented, so each individual programme has a progressively less central public existence. Perhaps only a long-running series could have the impact of a *Cathy Come Home* now; certainly the five-part *Boys from the Blackstuff* would have hardly been noticed as a single play. More likely, however, is the restriction of such impact to television 'events' which may have programmes at their centres but actually develop through the press and other media. (Julian Petley's important analysis of *Death of a Princess* illustrates how such an 'event' develops and what its effects can be.⁸)

So, again, who will defend the single play Our

⁷ Graham Murdock, 'Radical Drama, Radical Theatre', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol 2 no 2, 1980, pp 151-168.

⁸ Julian Petley, 'Parliament, the Press and "Death of a Princess"', *Drama-Documentary*, BFI Dossier 19, 1983, pp 89-105.

gloomy response can only be, who indeed? Certainly our wary hopes for Channel 4 in 1980 have not been realised. The new channel has no single play slot and has devoted most of its drama resources to a series of low-budget features, *Film on Four*. To date, none of these have in any way illustrated a real engagement with contemporary society and politics, although the forthcoming *The Ploughman's Lunch* is an important exception.

It would seem likely that this lack of resonance is at least partially dictated by the necessities of co-production, for, apart from a few projects set up early on, almost every *Film on Four* has been and will be only partly financed by Channel 4. Indeed, as Brian Winston has remarked, the channel 'seems to be the first British service to make co-financing a tradition'⁹.

There are, however, some indirect influences which Channel 4 can be seen to be exerting on television drama and the single play. Ironically they may be further aspects of the attack on the form. Certainly its arrival and its cost to the ITV companies has forced some of them at least to take stock of their real programme costs. And, in the words of LWT executive Barry Cox, 'We were shocked.' Cost-accountancy has become yet more influential. In addition, there appears to have been a related shift towards an even greater awareness of ratings points. If, as the ITV companies argue, they are losing money by

subsidising Channel 4, then the revenue from the ITV network transmissions must be maximised. And so LWT have been arguing with the network about slots for several British drama series. On at least three occasions, these have been placed after *News at Ten* when they were expected to get a 9 o'clock slot. Then in April the ITV network took the unprecedented step of moving the drama series *Studio* (from Granada) when it was halfway through its run. The ratings were poor, so it came out of its mid-evening spot and was relegated to a late-night time. In such a climate, what chance can there be for the survival of difficult and awkward single plays?

One final observation. In drama, Channel 4 has already committed itself heavily to (inevitably co-produced) recordings of theatrical hits: *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, *Kean* and *Arms and the Man* have already been shown, and the forthcoming *The Oresteia* and *The Beggar's Opera*, both from the National Theatre, are the first fruits of a long-term arrangement with that company. Unsurprisingly, none of this work (apart, perhaps, from *Nickleby*) has the qualities which we are concerned to defend. But it would already appear to be almost a staple ingredient in the schedule. How ironic then that, in a sense, it represents a return to the theatre on television which dominated the small screen in the 1950s. And how sad that a service committed to 'innovation and experiment' has to rely on one of television drama's oldest and least interesting forms.

⁹ Brian Winston, 'The Mid-Atlantic Wash', *The Listener*, March 3, 1983, p 34.

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C4—BRIDGEHEAD OR BANTUSTAN?

PAUL GILROY REVIEWS
CHANNEL 4'S BLACK PROGRAMMES



Eastern Eye: Channel 4's 'Asian' slot fragments the definition of 'black'.

Discussion of Channel 4's black-oriented output has so far centred on the politics of its production. Bitter arguments have been conducted over commissioning policy and practice¹, but these have contested the allocation of slices of Channel 4's ethnic cake rather than the recipe involved. Opposing positions share a

reluctance to evaluate the potential or assess the limitations of black 'popular' TV. It is possible to argue that farming out the major black shows to London Weekend Television (LWT) in the name of professionalism was not the best way to embark on a radical voyage away from the traditional power relations of the media industry. However, it is time to move beyond matters that are essentially internal to the world of TV and try to place the resulting programmes in relation to black political struggles and interests. Has the way they have so far represented black life been adequate? Is *No Problem* an advance on *The*

¹ Sebastian Clarke, 'Channel 4's Policy to Keep out Blacks', *Caribbean Times* 96, January 7, 1983, p 16; Sue Woodford, 'Replies', p 17, *ibid*; Sebastian Clarke, 'More on 4', *Caribbean Times* 97, January 14, 1983, p 16.

Fosters and Mixed Blessings? If so, in what ways? Is *Black on Black* more than an ethnic parody of *Nationwide*?

It is important to raise questions like these because the wind which blew black TV onto our screens was part of the storm which swept through Britain's inner cities in July '81. Those conflicts were another symptom of the problems which minority programming would help to solve. This alone demands that we should be vigilant, lest the black TV bandwagon develops a momentum of its own, out of step with the pace of black struggles in less auspicious surroundings.

The core of Channel 4's black programming is the weekly magazine slot alternately occupied by their 'West Indian' show, *Black On Black*, and its 'sister' programme, the 'Asian' *Eastern Eye*. Both shows are produced by LWT. The very separation and interchangeability of these programmes reveals something fundamental about Channel 4's understanding of race and racism in contemporary Britain. The existence of two programmes and the fastidiousness with which the boundaries of their respective ethnic concerns are maintained expresses the fragmentation of any common definitions of 'black' which the communities involved have struggled to create. The warrant for this operation, which consigns 'West Indians' to one ideological Bantustan and 'Asians' to another, derives from a pluralist or multi-cultural understanding of racial segmentation. This inflates the cultural aspects of racial differentiation to the exclusion of all other factors and makes them the determining agent in 'race relations'. The philosophical and political package involved differs little from fashionable concerns in educational circles over 'multi-culturalism'². Both rest on notions of ethnicity³ which make the fragmentation of 'blacks' into supposed cultural groupings not only necessary but desirable on the grounds that it allows specific attention to be paid to distinct groups of people. Though proponents of this approach

have considerable difficulties in sealing the limits of what constitutes a *bona fide* ethnic minority (are Geordies, Manx, Cornish or Cockney people ethnic groups?), they have little doubt that what they call 'Black and Asian' people are sufficiently different to warrant the forms of special consideration on offer. They view racial differences as relatively immobile cultural attributes of the communities involved – a position which, it has been pointed out, precisely parallels the contours of contemporary racist thought⁴.

High Tory ideologists and popular or common-sense racists share an understanding of all blacks as a threat to Britons and Britishness already ravaged by the effects of social and economic crisis. The beleaguered nation is disrupted by an unassimilable alien presence in its midst. Blacks are a problem because they are different. Their difference is confirmed by and literally reproduced in their culture: their 'indecent attachment to alien ways of life – in particular, different patterns of household organisation and sex/gender relations – continually demonstrates their distance from normal white British standards and behaviour. This unbridgeable cultural chasm is cited to endorse the racists' preferred solution to the problems which blacks create and grow to personify – repatriation.

This 'alienness' is proposed along varied ethnic lines, though certain themes are constant. Afro-Caribbean cultures are represented as 'incomplete', impoverished or deficient. They are argued to have been deformed by a pathological disorganisation which is the legacy of the long process of acculturation to which slaves were supposedly subject. Thus the contemporary culture of West Indians becomes nothing more than a bastard offshoot of English colonial activities. They may not be as different or as foreign as Asians who are, by comparison, handicapped by the strength and resilience of their culture, but then West Indian problems stem from the proximity of their culture to the real English thing, as much as from its deficiencies. Where West Indian culture is weak, Asian communities suffer from a surfeit of culture which is too strong. These differences are

² Hazel Carby, *Multi-Cultural Fictions*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies stencilled paper, 1980.

³ Errol Lawrence, 'In the Abundance of Water the Fool is Thirsty – Sociology and Black Pathology' in *The Empire Strikes Back*, London, Hutchinson, 1982.

⁴ Martin Barker, *The New Racism*, London, Junction Books, 1982

132 continually exposed in discussion of black family life. Here, cultural differences lead to cultural conflict along generational lines. This becomes, in turn, part of a cycle which includes excessive fertility, identity crises and, for West Indians, criminality. The pathological account of Asian households emphasises their supposedly excessive patriarchal character and has identified the issue of arranged marriages as a central theme around which their alienness is constructed.

What is important about the Channel 4 programmes is not that they reproduce this ideological package *in toto*, though at times they have endorsed these views of black life. It is rather that their frameworks duplicate the racist perspective in their attempt to encourage and celebrate the distinct cultures and ethnicities which racists have identified as the source of Britain's 'race relations problem'. This not only denies the possibility and the validity of political relationships between the communities which are essential to their survival in this country, but also offers the white viewer a portrait of the unassimilable alien culture in a form which invites the conclusion that the niggers and pakis are both being given special treatment. We are shown the spectacle of the 'ethnic' groups celebrating in their cultural ghettos and matters of political concern to both black communities are filtered and redistributed along spurious 'ethnic' lines.

'Policing' becomes a matter of concern primarily to West Indians, whereas immigration and nationality issues are of principal interest to Asians. This distances black TV from the day-to-day realities of life in Britain's colony areas, and weakens both communities where they have organised together or where an awareness of the complementarity of their struggles waits to be constructed. A good example of the limits of the 'ethnic' approach is provided by the *Black On Black* item on the Health Service strike which wasted the opportunity to link the issue of the dispute itself with the broader issue of the transformation of the NHS and the progressive exclusion of blacks from its provisions⁵, a matter of growing concern to blacks in Britain regardless of their ethnicity.

Black On Black

This show offers a mix of news and cultural coverage in a magazine format derived from *Nationwide*. The notion of ethnicity which the programme constructs parallels the national unity invoked by *Nationwide*, but *Black On Black* differs in that it features a studio audience who make its constituency visible. Their presence has grown more influential as the series has developed.

There is little that is distinctively West Indian about the first half of the programme. The format of investigation and documentary is faithfully reproduced, bolstered by the novelty value of black reporters. The news items in the first two programmes – the health workers' strike (November 9, 1982) and police brutality on a North London housing estate (November 23, 1982) – were the only occasions on which the political concerns of the black communities were reflected in the 'serious' part of the programme. Indeed, the choice of 'hard news' stories in the weeks which followed seemed to move as far as possible from domestic concerns. The coverage of conflicts in Zimbabwe and the struggles of North African workers in Renault's factories suggested that the producers had solved the recurring embarrassments of covering these issues by exporting what overtly political comment the programme contained. It is impossible to imagine *Black On Black* doing the Renault item on Fords or any other British car factory with large numbers of black workers.

The treatment of black news stories in the first two programmes is worth considering in greater detail. In both cases the implicit emphasis of the presentations was hijacked by the combativity of the studio audience, revealing a clash between the balanced editorial treatment of its coverage and the very culture to which the programme is officially dedicated.

The first *Black On Black* programme featured a bitter confrontation between the studio audience and Lord Trefgarne, the Conservative junior minister for Health. The contrast between this and the programme which followed raises a number of questions about how the voice of Britain's black minority is handled when it does break through onto 'ethnic' TV. Lord Trefgarne was given a very rough ride by an audience composed largely of hospital ancillary staff. They jeered him when he tried to argue that there had

⁵ From Ill Treatment to No Treatment, Manchester Law Centre Handbook no 7, 1982.

been no cuts in the Health Service, they interrupted him when he proposed privatisation and refused to defer to his status as either government minister or principal interviewee. The programme's presenter, Beverley Anderson, had to referee this match. Her comments to the crowd ('I accept your point. What are you going to do next?') and to the minister ('I think I must try and press you to be specific') suggest that she was pulled by the force of arguments made from the floor into a position of support for the black staff whose militancy far exceeded the line advocated by their union at national level. The debate ended when one woman told Trefgarne 'When we go back to the Health Service we're going on one week's strike, one week's strike with no emergency cover! Would you like that, well?' Anderson's support, albeit tentative, must have been an embarrassment to the programme's producers for it was clear that even 'ethnic' solidarity could jeopardise the protocols of editorial balance.

In the following edition, a potentially even more explosive issue – police malpractice – was dealt with in a very different way which set the standard for the programmes which followed. Interviews with figures likely to provoke the anger of the studio crowd were pre-recorded and edited. Anderson developed a style of chairing verging on the authoritarian which ensured that the opinions of the black working class would never again erupt unchecked from *Black On Black*. Since the second programme she has sought to mediate the ideas and opinions of the studio audience, translating them into the terms of an acceptable TV discourse. The brief documentary which preceded the studio discussion offered few challenges to the police view of a black housing estate as 'a tense and dangerous place' caught up in a 'spiral of escalating violence'. The young people who were interviewed were described as criminally inclined and the resolve with which they affirmed their right to self defence ('If we have to fight them we'll fight them') was produced as the confirmation of the police analysis.

The trademark of Anderson's revised approach to maintaining law and order in the studio was displayed in a tactic which she has since cultivated as a personal style. She takes an opinion from the audience and having translated it, offers it back in a simplified form, to which its

originator is invited to answer simply yes or no. She uses these short statements as a means of orienting the programme towards particular definitions of the problems being discussed and the preferred solutions to them. 'So you are saying there are better ways of organising themselves', 'So you think education and economic advance are the solution', 'So you are saying the training period is too short', 'So the problem isn't the colour', 'So you seem to think that', 'So you are saying' and so on. The protests of one member of the audience who pleaded 'Hear me out' under a barrage of her questions and summaries did nothing to prevent the issue of police violence on the housing estate being gradually reduced to the repeated question 'What must the police do?' The familiar prescription of reforms – longer training, more black officers, etc – was wheeled out as the answer.

There is another side to *Black On Black*, its cultural coverage. Each programme moves from news items towards lighter material which is often humorous and tends to involve performers – poets, singers, musicians, toasters and dancers – from black communities all over England. The politics so effectively banished from the news section have reappeared in almost inverse proportions in this part of the show. The bridge between the two halves is provided by Victor Romero Evans (a well-known singer and actor) in the character of 'Moves', a charming, eloquent and streetwise hustler who offers the audience a critical and satirical view of the week's political events in the form of a brief monologue. Not only does his monologue provide the sole point at which the 'ethnic' character of the programme impinges on its *form*, Evans and his scriptwriter, Farrukh Dhondy, have also managed to use the slot to make useful political observations. It was Moves who attacked the black crime panic which followed the issue of the crime statistics, Moves who denounced the Budget, pointed to the destabilisation of Zimbabwe, raised the issues of nuclear power and the water workers dispute, and highlighted the inadequacy of Channel 4 as a vehicle of black interests. Moves speaks a mild patois which conceals his message from the Independent Broadcasting Authority. He is also able to get away with a lot in the name of 'ethnic humour' with which his presentations are spiced. Many of the poets and performers who have appeared on the show have used Afro-Caribbean

134 language in a similar way. Their performances have drawn active encouragement from the audience who have responded to their wit and political comment with black enthusiasm not previously seen on British TV. The audience's delight appears to deepen with the complexity of the patois wordplay. Moves has even gone so far as to use their reaction to subvert the studio audience format by planting actors among the crowd who reinforce or challenge him on particular points.

The use of Afro-Caribbean language consists of far more than the celebration of ethnicity which has sponsored it. It operates a simple mechanism of inclusion/exclusion which is instantly able to set limits on the community it invokes. It is this feeling of community which is fostered by the presence and responsiveness of the studio audience. The linguistic barrier which Moves erects halfway through the proceedings transposes the show into a different key, sharply separating its audience along 'racial' lines. The ability to comprehend this language of resistance marks the boundaries not of ethnicity but of a distinct political culture. Moves' contribution is only one example of how the programme's cultural content is often at odds with its editorial positions. However, even in the cultural field there is tension and, as the series has developed, the musicians who have offered a cautious endorsement of Rasta themes, conspicuous by their absence from the rest of the programme, have been replaced by Gospel choirs which present a respectable view of black leisure activity.

No Problem?

Part of Channel 4's strategy has been to build up a black viewing slot on Friday nights. The mid-evening space was first occupied by the appalling reggae documentary *Deep Roots Music*, then by videoed fragments of performances from the 'Sunsplash' reggae festival for tourists in Jamaica. The latter was used as a curtain-raiser for the comedy series *No Problem*. If popularity in the black community provides the criterion, then this is probably the most successful of Channel 4's black shows, though it would be wrong to infer too much from this, as passing straws are popular with people who are

drowning. This series, which is claimed as a major innovation, parades all the classic attributes of TV sit-com in black form. Its problems arise where the preoccupations of sit-com dovetail with the ideologies of contemporary racism. It must be criticised not only for what it invites white viewers to find funny, but also for the ways in which it represents the black community to itself. These different readings are made possible by the fact that this series, even more effectively than *Black On Black*, transmits the sense of a shared, exclusive culture. The sit-com form, however, allows the excluded to maintain some contact with the show and to laugh at different things, which a common-sense racist perspective identifies as realistic traits of black life. Racist meanings or explanations can therefore be cemented by the series even though it is read by the black audience in a non-realist way.

No Problem depicts the lives of the five Powell children and their various friends and neighbours after their parents have left Britain and returned to Jamaica, thus structuring the possibility of voluntary repatriation at the heart of the situation. The family is a key site of sit-com, providing an open ended domestic context which allows the narrative of each episode to be resolved without being closed. Here this familial feeling is expanded to encompass the black audience, who are included by virtue of their familiarity with distinctive norms of black humour and language. But representations of the black family are also at the centre of the racist pathology described above. The absence of the parents means that *No Problem* presents the black family as *a priori* incomplete and deficient. The principal characters also reiterate the racist pathology in a variety of ways. Power relations in the household have been reorganised to compensate for the missing authority of mum and dad. Janet Kay's 'Angel' is the surrogate mother. She runs the house, provides the meals and most of the in-house action takes place in her kitchen.

Her sisters, Shopwe Shodiende's 'Terri' and Judith Jacob's 'Sensi', represent two views of black female sexuality which contrast with Angel's asexual, matronly, service role. Both are a considerable distance from the conventions of acceptable femininity and racist pathology has endowed each with connotations of deviancy.



The *No Problem* cast: the parentless black family as incomplete.

Sensi, the tomboy, is masculinised, while Terri, a model by profession, is overt and excessive in her sexuality and the principal vehicle for sexual innuendo in the programme. It is interesting that sexuality is a fundamental aspect of ethnic difference and this allows a much higher level of humour based in sexual themes than would be acceptable in a comparable white sit-com.

The boys in the programme also fit the pathology framework. Chris Tummings' 'Toshiba' fulfills the older racist stereotype of the clown as well as suggesting that young black men have nothing to offer but machismo, music and wise cracks. His word play and rhyming do, however, offer the black viewer a real source of pleasure. Terri's boyfriend, 'The Beast' (Malcolm Frederick), is an archetype of criminality—a shady club owner, fashion magnate and businessman eternally on the edge of the big deal. Victor Romero Evans as the animal-loving 'Bellamy' requires separate consideration; since his character is as separate from the stereotypes as the tent he lives in is from the house the rest of his family occupy.

Evans is the same actor who portrays Moves on *Black On Black*. As an established actor and singer in his own right, he has built a personal following which savours his performances regardless of the character he is acting out. He and the family's cousin 'Melba' provide the few moments in which comic acting rather than comic situations dominate the show.

Unfortunately Melba remains a prisoner of the pathology model in that the humour surrounding her is based on the generational conflict which is an integral component of the racist account of black family life. Terri describes her age as '25 going on 308', and in the family disagreements she sides with Angel, the residual parent figure.

I am not suggesting that the stereotypes and family orientation of the programme mean that it is readily transferable to reality. For the black audience at least, much of its comedy derives precisely from its distance from the real. Yet the images it offers are as important for what they exclude as for what they present, and the programme rarely fails to block out the idea that there is more to blackness than various

combinations of frivolity, religion and sex: *No Problem* does not refer to or align itself with existing struggles in the black community. In this it perpetuates the idea that blacks themselves, rather than racism, must be the source of all ethnic humour, despite the important start made by Evans and Dhondy (who also co-writes this programme with Mustapha Matura) in challenging this idea via Moves' raps on *Black On Black*.

Where black life fails to generate laughs, the humour of *No Problem* is created from all the traditional devices of sit-com: mistaken identity, double entendre, unexpected visitors, domestic crises, men dressing as women, and the family simply being stuck with each other. The situations are no more real than the comic personalities which, though scarcely more than vehicles for amusing dialogue, allow the actors to mobilise stereotypes without creating characters. Blacks in particular may laugh at the introduction of a black policeman or magistrate into the lives of the Powells, but this move suggests that the cloak of ethnicity and belongingness is being drawn around them also. The implication that these figures, regardless of their class and role within state institutions, can be a part of one happy black family without any problems cuts right across the direction of contemporary black politics.

It is tempting to explain the absence of overt politics from the show by arguing that its writers, both well acquainted with the political configurations of the black communities, are probably reluctant to trivialise the political realities involved. This position would obscure the extent to which *No Problem* deals with political issues linked with its authors' previous works. The theme of political organisation has repeatedly been trivialised in a manner which would have done justice to *Citizen Smith*, particularly in the episode (February 25, 1983) when two different campaigns with the same initials get muddled up only to unite in a bid to

free the 'Willesden One'; and in the show (March 11, 1983) when a coup in Beast's home island forms the backdrop to the action. This episode also featured the occupation of Willesden Green against Cruise missiles. *No Problem* continues the anti-Rasta themes in co-author Mustapha Matura's previous plays, firstly by defining Rasta emphatically outside the family and secondly by making it visible in the ridiculous form of Isaiah, the youth worker from the club down the road. Finally, the authors, who are both of Asian 'ethnic origin', confirm their mastery of the characteristics of Caribbean humour by locking 'West Indian ethnicity' in place with a series of jokes at the expense of the Asian communities which would not be out of place on *Mind Your Language*. A hoard of gags about 'illegal immigrants from Finchley' and 'Abdul the camel driver' are deployed to mark the boundaries of the definition of blackness which is on display. These make it clear that the writers are prepared to sacrifice the fragile nature of political unity between the communities in the name of a laugh.

Jokes which feed white racism and nurture divisions in the black communities are still jokes. But when a black studio audience is induced to debate the amount of cash required to deport them from Britain without protest, as happened recently on *Black On Black*, it is time to challenge the people responsible for making these programmes, regardless of their race and their past political achievements. The struggle against 'ethnic' TV must be waged now, not least because there has been so little of value in what Channel 4 has offered the black communities so far. It may be that the professional ideologies and allegiances of black media workers are necessarily in conflict with the political choices of the communities whose causes they profess but seldom advocate. That is a pessimistic position – it remains to be tested as the flight continues into the cosy illusions of multi-ethnic media pluralism.

'BROOKSIDE'—NO COMMON GROUND

CHRISTINE GERAGHTY WATCHES THE NEW 'REALISTIC' SERIAL

It is always hard for a new serial to establish itself. The characters seem thin, the situations contrived, the settings unfamiliar. *Brookside* compounded these problems by running foul of the bad language lobby and simply by being put out on the much maligned Channel 4. But four months after the opening episode, it is possible to look at the way it differs from other long-running television serials and to begin to analyse the effect of that difference.

In an article published in *Woman* magazine *Brookside's* deviser Phil Redmond attacks other British TV serials for being 'soft and bland in their approach'. He believes that 'where the others—*Coronation Street*, *Crossroads*, *Emmerdale Farm*—have failed is in their ability to cope with realistic issues and everyday problems'. 'I found ... that people will accept and actually want programmes that tell the truth and show society as it really is.' He appeals to the reader to make a direct comparison with her/his own experience in order to understand the *Brookside* ethos—'Did you ever live in a place where the whole street congregates in the same pub every night? It just doesn't happen.' This commitment to realism at the level of narrative is backed up by an attention to detail on the set:

You know—how an actor in a studio can't slam a door without the wall falling down; how the geography of mocked up houses is all wrong. You go through the main door of the Rovers Return, walk up to the bar and turn right to go into the gents loo—in reality, what you're doing is stepping into Albert Tatlock's living room. Ours are all real working houses. You open a fridge and the light comes on. It's that sense of reality.¹

I am aware that an article in a popular magazine is more of a public relations exercise than a chance for Redmond to express his aesthetic philosophy. What is interesting about the piece, however, is the way it sets *Brookside* up as being the same as other serials—it deals with 'personal problems'—but crucially different in its approach. 'Realism' is said to be 'Redmond's creed'. In one sense this is a useful marketing ploy, particularly in its controversial attack on *Coronation Street*. But the commitment to show 'society as it really is' does help to explain why *Brookside* is as it is and what, in my opinion, has gone wrong.

All the British serials mentioned by Redmond, and others including his own *Grange Hill*, have an institution or a community as a focal point. Characters move in and out of a pub, a hospital, a school in a way that ensures that they will have something in common and that their lives will 'naturally' overlap. Redmond finds this use of the Rovers Return in *Coronation Street* implausible and in *Brookside* there is no such institution. This may seem an academic point but since it affects the way in which the narrative is organised it has far-reaching implications. Because there is literally no common ground, the interweaving of stories, so characteristic of the serial, becomes a product of editing rather than place. There is nowhere for the characters to meet haphazardly, to exchange a bit of gossip or pass on information. Interaction between them is nearly always deliberate and is part of the main drive of the narrative rather than a comment on it. *Brookside* also quite frequently abandons the traditional intercutting of two or three stories in favour of giving one episode over to events in a particular family. Thus, a recent episode in March concentrated almost entirely on the

¹ Quoted in *Woman*, December 4, 1982, p 38.

138 implications for the Grant family of Sheila losing her job. One gets a sense of lives being lived in parallel rather than being shared, and moments when the families are brought together are moments of crisis and unease.

These formal changes indicate clearly that the pleasures of *Brookside* are quite different from those of *Coronation Street*. *Coronation Street* offers a number of characters who share a broadly similar class position and who, while they argue among themselves, unite as a community in the face of a shared tragedy or to celebrate a special event. In *Brookside*, the three main families are quite specifically set up as representatives of different class positions and relationships between them are antagonistic rather than friendly. In this respect, Roger Huntingdon's attitude to his neighbours is fairly typical. He tries to bully one neighbour into taking down a shed and accuses another of burgling his house. In some ways, this is a welcome antidote to the cosiness which can overwhelm *Coronation Street* on some occasions. If, however, a sense of community is one of the

utopian pleasures offered us by entertainment (as Richard Dyer has argued) *Brookside* takes a great risk by refusing us that ideal. It is very easy for representation of class antagonism to disintegrate into a general sense of bickering and bad temper.

One further consequence of the rejection of a central meeting place is that the narrative is thrown back onto events within the separate families. *Brookside* is striking in its concentration on families. Thus far there are no single people, no gays, no divorcees, no widows in the close. Even in terms of realism, this seems rather bizarre, since in Britain there are now more people living outside the conventional family unit than within it, but it does have other consequences. As a single person living on my own, I find it difficult to identify with any of the characters (although I have a faint twinge of recognition when Lucy or Karen appears). The emphasis is very much on couples; young people are offered a range of recognisable figures though these are also based within the family and defined as children. The elderly are almost entirely ignored, as if *Brookside's* realism has



Brookside woman in the family: Heather Huntingdon and husband Roger.

come to be equated with punks and youth unemployment but not with the difficulties and problems of old age.

The commitment to realism and the emphasis on families in *Brookside* has also had an effect on the way in which women are represented. The conventions of soap opera have offered time and space to 'women's issues' and Redmond is aware of this potential. In the article I referred to earlier, he gives examples of the problems he wants the programme to take on board: 'Infertility, for one – 40 per cent of the population suffer from it, yet it's not really talked about. And the menstrual cycle – how society tends to ignore the effect it has on women.' *Brookside* has dealt with these subjects and others of importance to women. When, for example, Sheila Grant lost her job, the emphasis was on the importance of her wage to the family and her determination not to be trapped at home.

However, the conventions of soap opera permit serials to do something other than allow particular issues to be brought to the audience's attention. In the first place, they are able to

present women as strong characters with views of their own who have to make their own decisions – not superwomen, but women who are required to take action and are responsible for the consequences. This may be because the characters do not have a man to fall back on and are therefore forced into independence. In varied ways, Emily Bishop and Elsie Tanner are both in this situation, however differently they are seen to cope with it. And even the women who live in families have a history, so that the audience is aware that they have previously been on their own. We 'knew' Rita and Deirdre, for example, before they married; they had a status other than that of wife or mother. *Brookside*, particularly with Sheila Grant and Heather Huntingdon, tries to give us representations of women who are not subservient to their families, but the attempt is undermined because they are nearly always seen in relation to their husbands or children. It is the women, for instance, who liaise with others about their children – Sheila Grant sees the Educational Welfare Officer about Damon and the doctor and priest about Karen;

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Brookside women together: Heather Huntingdon and Annabel Collins.

140 Annabel Collins discusses Gordon's difficulties with his headmaster. The women in *Brookside*, unlike those in *Coronation Street*, *Crossroads* or *Angels*, very rarely talk to each other; they are defined by their roles within the family even as they fight against them.

This is partly because little attention is paid to women's work and when it is, the realist aesthetic demands that it should be represented as low paid, badly organised and vulnerable. While this is true of women's work in general, it means that *Brookside* cannot show women organising either in terms of their job or their trade union. In the Grant family, Bobby is the active shop steward while Sheila is not even a union member; it is he who leads the strike while she occupies the traditional female role of supporter and occasional critic. Paul Collins has been a high-up executive while Annabel is thinking about part-time work. Women like Petra tend to have rather vague jobs as secretaries while the ambition of the younger women like Karen and Lucy can scarcely be articulated because they are faced with unemployment. In this respect, *Brookside* falls well behind the under-rated *Angels* which, because of its setting, continually shows women making important decisions in their working lives, and *Crossroads*, which includes both the women running the motel and Sharon Metcalfe efficiently managing a garage. Even *Coronation Street*, which has been much criticised for the way it represents work, has a woman shop steward. It is ironic that *Brookside*, the progressive serial, should be trapped by its own commitment to accuracy and is therefore apparently unable to represent women as workers or trade unionists in any radical or challenging way.

Finally, *Brookside* differs from the other serials I have mentioned because it does not seem to operate from a female viewpoint or to assume a female audience. Charlotte Brunsdon argues that *Crossroads* 'textually implies a feminine viewer to the extent that its textual discontinuities require a viewer competent within the ideological and moral frameworks, the rules of romance, marriage and family life to make sense of it'.² Terry Lovell writes that soap opera offers 'a

context in which women can ambiguously express both good-humoured acceptance of their oppression and recognition of that oppression, and some equally good-humoured protest against it'.³ These serials offer to women the very rare pleasure of recognition or celebration of important things in their own lives – the conflict between work and personal relationships, the possibility of friendship with other women, a wry humour sometimes about their relationships with men. Because of this, it seems to me that women are crucially the norm by which, as Brunsdon says, the narrative is understood. Women in serials are not mysterious, enigmatic or threatening; they are not peripheral or exceptional as they are in thrillers or crime series. They are understandable to the audience, if not to the male characters, because the narrative concentrates on their dilemmas. In the recent dramas in *Coronation Street*, it was Deirdre's position which was given the most attention, in a way which allowed expression of her divided feelings while husband Ken remained uncomprehending and baffled. There is a complicity about the way in which the women speak to each other in these serials which implies that they share the same set of references even when individual answers to particular problems differ. It is this set of references which the audience is invited to share.

This sense of a common bond between the women characters and the audience flickers only fitfully in *Brookside*. This is partly because, as I have described, the women in *Brookside* are unable to cross the family/class boundaries and any attempt to do so tends to lead to confrontation and trouble. It is significant that the rare moments of intimacy between women nearly always occur between mother and daughter (Sheila and Karen Grant, Annabel and Lucy Collins) or between sisters in the case of Petra Taylor and Michelle. In such conversations, the women share experiences from a common viewpoint but one which is kept firmly within the family. In addition, *Brookside* is exceptional in the weight given to its male characters. Because of the way in which women's work is represented, the stories which focus on

² Charlotte Brunsdon, 'Crossroads, Notes on Soap Opera', *Screen* vol 22 no 4, p 37.

³ Terry Lovell, 'Ideology and Coronation Street', *Coronation Street*, London, British Film Institute Television Monograph, p 51.

the workplace, trade unionism and industrial action almost inevitably involve the male characters and concentrate in particular on Bobby Grant. A recent episode (March 16, 1983) set in a club on St Patrick's night, dealt with the questions raised by Mattie's redundancy and the union's involvement in the deal. It was a probing and moving episode, but the women were almost entirely excluded from it and took no part in the men's discussion. Bobby Grant, in particular, is a character of considerable complexity, played with some force by Ricky Tomlinson. While he is not always right, his views are given an attention and moral weight which is unusual. In its handling of Bobby and his workmates, the programme is concerned to stress the importance of male comradeship. It seems to find it much more difficult to represent women talking and acting together.

I do not want to argue that the way in which women are given space in other serials is to be accepted uncritically. Certainly the assumption that women have common values and problems (are 'sisters under the skin', to quote Annie Walker quoting Kipling in a recent *Coronation Street* episode) can lead these programmes to underestimate the difference generated by race and class. Nevertheless, as Brunson and Lovell indicate, the roles played by women in serials, the attention given to their concerns, is an important source of pleasure and one which surely could have been used radically. It seems symptomatic of *Brookside* that while it is clearly concerned to take up women's issues – infertility, housework, menstruation – it actually represents women in a way which appears to reinforce sexual stereotyping rather than to challenge it. And, by denying women the pre-

eminence they normally have in soap operas, it deprives the audience of one of soap opera's major pleasures.

After a somewhat shaky start, *Brookside* is doing well what it initially set out to do. It is taking up a range of issues which are not normally dealt with in this way and is beginning to build up a set of strong characters and dramatic situations. The death of Gavin has broken the earlier remorseless emphasis on couples and has opened up narrative possibilities for Petra in terms of her friends and her job. The Ratepayers Association may provide a basis (however unlikely) for a friendship between Sheila Grant and Annabel Collins. It seems to me, however, that the basic problem still remains. *Brookside* has rejected certain conventions in order to represent society more realistically than does *Coronation Street*. Realism is defined by an attention to naturalistic detail and a desire to grapple with major social issues such as unemployment. What has been lost, however, are the pleasures which the traditional serial offers – the intricate plotting of parallel stories, the sense of community, the space given to women and the issues that concern them, a chance to see women assert themselves. Working in a different but related format, *The Boys from the Black Stuff* showed that it was possible to go beyond social realism with a surrealist juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy, a demand for political and emotional attention. One wishes that *Brookside* had shaken up the serial form in the same way, by experimenting and playing with its possibilities, rather than rejecting them because they might be escapist and, by implication, dangerous.

March 20, 1983

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PUTTING NARRATIVE IN PLACE

MICK EATON REVIEWS A WEEKEND SCHOOL ON EARLY CINEMA

Watching the pre-1906 films shown at the 'Inventing the Cinema' weekend at Dartington in 1980¹, it was impossible not to wonder whether they were the necessary precursors of the manipulation of space and time, the novelistic enterprise of narrative cinema, or whether early cinematic forms offer an alternative, or a set of alternatives, to a regime of representation monolithically referred to as 'dominant cinema'. Were these films the prelinguistic stutters of an infant, already within language, within the social, but not adept enough to communicate across the gulf that separates us, stumbling (to mix the metaphor) along a dark road which leads to the dawn of continuity editing? Or were there different exigencies in operation which did not demand the presentation of a spectacle, complete and inviting for the spectator addressed as an individual, though in the midst of a crowd?

A different set of questions assailed this spectator when viewing films from 1906-1916 at the follow-up event, the recent weekend school, 'Putting Narrative in Place'.² For in this period we witness a development of the codes of cinema which have been with us ever since, and a consolidation of the cinematic institution. It became an impossibility to use these films as part of a utopian search for the possibility of another cinema; to find, like a demented nineteenth century archaeologist, the lineaments of a cinema of the future in the remains of a cinema of the past. Hence the need for sober, painstaking empirical research to temper not only the excesses of a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* teleology,

but also an equally naive, though undoubtedly more exciting, search for alternative models in early cinema which may be of some use to a contemporary avant-garde.³

Certainly the empirical scope and theoretical diversity of the speakers at the event was very wide. One of them, Don Ranvaud, characterised approaches to early cinema as follows: the teleological approach, which sees developments in film technique as experiments which eventually achieve the goal of narrative coherence; those approaches which seek the masterpiece or the exception – a critical paradigm all too familiar to readers of cinema history (and one which has created particular problems of evaluation around the work of DW Griffith); and an industrial, economic approach.

It is tempting to fit the other speakers at the weekend into these categories, but to do so would be short-sighted: if Barry Salt's approach is undoubtedly teleological, it is a teleology which is based on exhaustive viewing and analysis which, because of its methodological thoroughness avoids an unsophisticated unilinearity. If Noel Burch's work sometimes seems to have similarities with the 'ideology of the masterpiece' approach (more discernible in 'Propositions'⁴ than in more recent writings perhaps) it is equally grounded in socio-historical research and is not at all motivated by any specious cataloguing of famous firsts, but by a desire to question the apparent naturalness of what he terms the Institutional Mode of Representation. If Ben Brewster's accounts of early cinematic developments could be characterised as 'industrial', they are nonetheless devoid of any crude determinism in their attempt to explain an institution of cinema which

¹ Reviewed by Paul Kerr, 'Re-Inventing the Cinema' in *Screen*, vol 21 no 4, pp 80-84. Papers by Ben Brewster, 'A Scene at the "Movies"', and Noel Burch, 'Narrative/Diegesis – Threshold, Limits' in *Screen*, July/August 1982, vol 23 no 2, pp 4-15 and 16-33, respectively.

² Co-sponsored by East Midlands Arts and SEFT at the Metro Cinema, Derby, December 10-12, 1982.

³ Rod Stoneman, 'Perspective Correction: Early Film to the Avant-Garde' in *Afterimage* 8/9, pp 50-63.

⁴ Noel Burch and Jorge Dana, 'Propositions' in *Afterimage* 5, pp 40-66.

guarantees the production of pleasure as well as profits. John Fullerton's detailed case-study and diachronic analysis of a national cinema, the Svenska Biografteatern, might be similarly categorised, but it avoided national insularity and generalisation in its concern to theorise studio developments in articulation with the demands of a world market. In short, and almost beyond belief, all of the speakers avoided the kind of theoretical and methodological shoddiness which unfortunately characterises so much 'film history'. The weekend could be criticised for not allowing differences of theoretical approach between the speakers to emerge more concretely, but, from my position of bug-eyed ignorance in the stalls, the novelty of both the filmic and discursive material presented meant that the suspension of argument was, at this stage at least, more than welcome.

As the title of the weekend school indicated, it was during the period 1906-16 that cinema moved out of the fairground, the shop-front theatre and the music-hall; changed its content and mode of address to include more 'respectable' classes of society; and consolidated, through codes of lighting, set-design, performance and editing, an illusory three-dimensional narrative space. The weekend was concerned with the international character of the film industry before World War I, and the choice of films from France, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Italy as well as the USA reflected this. However, it was clear from Brewster's opening presentation that the international 'language' of silent cinema, which ensured the exportability of films, came to be increasingly dominated by America, and that the trend towards an oligopolistic organisation was underway prior to the organisation of the Motion Picture Patents Company – the Trust – in 1908. The growth of the 'independents' either as producers, distributors or exhibitors can be nostalgically over-estimated.

This growth, of course, was partly a result of geographical and demographic factors. In the beginning of the period under consideration, Pathé was the biggest film producer in the world, with half its profits coming from US markets, but the small size of its domestic market meant that growth was inhibited in Europe. However, the development of a theatrical market in the US was unmatched in any other part of the world, so much so that by 1915 half of the

world's cinemas were in the USA. European companies were dependent on the US in a way that did not apply in reverse. Brewster's contention was that the move up-market in the States took place much earlier and much more easily than many film historians have claimed. The early proletarian audiences of the store-front theatres, with a high percentage of newly-arrived immigrants, were economically unreliable. Theatre owners were anxious to move to prime real estate markets in downtown or suburban shopping centres, eager to encourage patrons with a greater spending power.

Developments in technique and subject-matter can be situated alongside these structural changes. It is sometimes claimed that the Trust inhibited developments in film technique, particularly the development of the feature-length film, but, according to Brewster, the situation was more complex, for the longer film seems to have been part of the up-market trend that the Trust was anxious to develop. It is interesting to see how many of these drew on historical subject-matter, which demanded a greater degree of 'realism' in setting, costume design, acting and background detail, as they were aimed at a bourgeois market familiar with a particular style of historical representation through the conventions of Victorian genre paintings, waxworks tableaux, lantern shows etc. Such historical narratives, the present in drag, were already the property of the middle-classes; they were inherently respectable.

But the increased investment required by the look of such spectacles meant that they were high-risk ventures, particularly for European companies dependent on US distribution. These were often made by one-off companies: the 1912 *Queen Elizabeth* starring Sarah Bernhardt was made by such a company in Britain and exploited by the independent, Adolph Zukor, in the US. Perhaps the reason that Italy specialised in these high-cost prestigious ventures is explained by the fact that, as Ranvaud pointed out, the industry there involved aristocratic investment and elite patronage. The long film developed in Europe but was dependent on America. Seen in this context, *The Birth of a Nation*, itself the product of a company especially set up to produce it, with its theatrical length and exploitation, remains a founding moment – but only to the extent that it showed that American films could achieve a degree of

spectacularity and cultural prestige to rival the Europeans. Brewster maintained that it is at the most prestigious end of the market, producing films with a cultural address to the middle-class, that innovative techniques developed, precisely because the films were sold on their 'newness'. However, the somewhat complex situation outlined above still does not answer whether the Trust's monopolistic attempts played an inhibiting role in relation to the feature. The irony of the situation is, of course, that the spectacular 'novelty' of the historical epics pillaged nineteenth century narrative and visual forms, shackling cinematic representation to Victorian bourgeois philistinism. The spatio-temporal illusions of cinema were spectacularly and magnificently 'invented' to stroke pre-existent middle-class taste.

During the weekend we were able to examine the developments of both filmic and pro-filmic techniques: the move away from the (consciously?) flat construction of early cinema to an increasing sense of depth through lighting codes largely adapted from the Old Masters; the move away from the technological tricks of early cinema to moral narratives; the move away from the animated tableaux of early literary adaptations⁵ to autonomous diegetic reconstructions; the move away from the anarchic infantilism of early film comedies to an increasing wealth of characters and settings; the move away from one-shot constructions of scenes to a fully-fledged rapid point-of-view continuity editing style. So it is difficult not to experience a sense of loss when seeing films from this period, which is the opposite of the sense of exhilaration felt when viewing the earlier films, and to romanticise the early 'pioneers' squeezed out and defeated by American commercial interests in the inexorable movement towards the novelistic.

However, this reaction is in its own way just as teleological as that which sees the first twenty years of cinema as a series of pre-historic experiments before the proper, sufficient language of cinema is finally discovered and established for all time. It was apparent watching these films that the exigencies that film-makers faced in relation to their audiences were not

always simple and often contradictory – the demands, for example, to tell a story well and make beautiful pictures. Brewster maintained that to be a spectator is to say 'I am a person who likes this type of cinema', that there is an inherent realisation that other types exist. True enough, and yet these choices, these attempts at spectator self-definition are most often contained within narrative and generic constraints: 'I am a person who likes Westerns; I am a person who likes films about rich people; I am a person who likes films where the hero is reconciled with his aged father in the last reel.' There is no provision for the spectator who says 'I am a person who is tired of this space, these characters and their little dramas.' Such a person must seek relief in the sanctity of the Co-op, not the Roxy.

But the doubt remains, particularly hearing Burch⁶ on the aspiration towards speech in 'silent' cinema – with its musical accompaniment protecting the spectator from the noises of the machine and the other spectators, and its lecturers organising the audience's look – whether there could ever have been a powerful alternative to the Institutional Mode of Representation. Are such alternatives necessarily confined to the margins, outside of the market place?

Certainly, any cinematic or theoretical practice which grounds itself on a search for an essence of cinema to be discovered in its technology, any 'alternative' cinema which defines itself solely in diametric opposition, ignoring the history of the institution of cinema and looking elsewhere – to the discourses of the visual arts, for example – for inspiration, can never effectively oppose that institution and its spectatorial implications. The technology of the cinema was the product of both a set of nineteenth century social and economic relations, and a set of nineteenth century representational aspirations, organised, developed and consolidated in a context of early twentieth century oligopolic capitalism. The production of knowledge about those relations, those aspirations, the institution and its history, is as essential to the construction of an alternative cinema, as it is to the analysis of its dominant currents.

⁵ See, for example, the discussion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Noel Burch, 'Porter, or Ambivalence' in *Screen*, Winter 1978/9, vol 19 no 4, pp 96-99.

⁶ See also 'Charles Baudelaire versus Doctor Frankenstein' and 'How We Got Into Pictures: Notes Accompanying *Correction Please*' in *Afterimage* 8/9, pp 4-21, 22-38.

LUST FOR LIVES

MARY JOANNOU AND STEVE McINTYRE REPORT FROM A CONFERENCE ON THE BIOPIC

'Lust for Lives', the BFI's weekend school on film biographies¹, coincided with the release of a major new biopic, *Gandhi*, but the main focus of study was on three films drawn from the dominant production category of showbiz biography – *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Lenny*, and *The Buddy Holly Story* – plus one 'great life', *Madame Curie*, drawn from the classic era of Hollywood biopics, the thirties and forties, when more than 50 biopics were produced, including many Warner Brothers classics. The emphasis on showbiz biopics may have been determined by a desire to attract a local audience from the North West, but it narrowed the range of the weekend disappointingly. Limited attention could be given to interesting questions focused around 'exemplary' lives drawn from history, or to filmic biography which could be construed as expressing a desire to understand or promote information about political, cultural or scientific change. Notions such as these have traditionally informed biography, conceived of as an instrument of edification; and these concerns might be seen to characterise recent productions

such as *Gandhi* or *Reds*. Almost no space could be given to consideration of alternatives to the Hollywood system, to films which do not conform to schematic patterns of an individual's struggle for success, fame, and achievement – films such as Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Amy*, or Rossellini's *Blaise Pascal*, a materialist biopic which attempts to put its subject back into history, language, and social relations.

Although the biopic is an industrial staple, and accounts for some of the most prestigious productions of recent years, little of any consequence has yet been written on it, and there has yet to be any substantial investigation of it. As an explanation of this neglect, Caroline Merz suggested:

[Current] film/television theory, using insights gained from structuralism and psychoanalysis, seems to have no room for biographical entertainments... [they] have perhaps been left out of debates in film theory because they make problematic a purely 'conventionalist' position, that is, one which argues that 'reality' is unknowable (and perhaps non-existent) and that all representation is concerned to construct images of reality which are – in reality, as it were – only images. Biopics signal themselves through their form, their use of stars to represent 'real' people, as fictions, but at the same time it cannot be denied that what they seek to represent is at some level knowable, is

¹ Organised in conjunction with North-West Arts and the University of Manchester Department of Extra-Mural Studies; held at Holly Royde College in Manchester, January 7-9, 1983.

It seems implausible to suggest that structuralist inspired theory should have any difficulty with biopics even if—just because—those texts purport to say something about real events, real lives—after all, don't all fictional texts also purport to say something about real life and the nature of real people? Furthermore, structuralism put into doubt that very uncritical facticity which Merz suggests poses problems for its application to the biopic. As Foucault has it:

*The fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchies of its practices—establish for every man, from the very start the empirical orders with which he will be dealing, and within which he will be at home.*³

Two clusters of questions informed discussion over the weekend. The first centred around the nature and structure of the biopic, and its filmic specificity, and included such questions as narrative organisation, characterisation, and so forth. The second dealt with the significance of biopics, in particular, how the viewer is positioned in relation to the text, what sorts of pleasures are offered, and the importance of the 'unitary individual' constructed by these films.

Is the biopic a genre? To suggest the filmic specificity of the films derives from the fact that they have as their main character (usually) a real person, living or dead, is like suggesting the generic status for the musical is given by the presence of music—a singularly unhelpful criterion. The real person criterion is inadequate for definition—is *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* a biopic? Is *Citizen Kane*? What about *Chariots of Fire*? The issue of definition was posed most starkly by the choice of films—is there any real difference between *Madame Curie* and other (albeit rare) films about scientists and science? Is there any way to distinguish *Coal Miner's Daughter* and *The Buddy Holly Story* from other musicals with a central artist character such as *Rose* and *A Star is Born*? If the biopic is a genre, are there sub-divisions within it? How useful is it

to think in terms of the gangster biopic, the musical biopic, the melodrama biopic?

In theorising the genre, Merz draws heavily on work on biographies, particularly theories about the nature and meaning of nineteenth century biography. She sees Carlyle as the representative of a biographical emphasis in history, claiming that this was characteristic of a romanticism attempting to re-establish individualism in a society where this seemed under threat. Unfortunately, this just does not stand up historically. Romanticism was a complex and diverse movement, but as an ideology in Britain, one central strand was an opposition to the rampant individualism inherent in bourgeois Enlightenment thinking, stressing instead such ideas as the holism of the race/nation, the spirit of the people, and the synergistic notion of the whole as being more than, and irreducible to, the sum of the individual parts. So any romantic stress on individuals tended towards a stress on their status as representative—embodying some 'essence' of the race. Merz is on safer ground in considering the context of biography in the later nineteenth century, where it is seen precisely as the ideology of bourgeois thought, of self help, advancement, and individual improvement. In the United States too, a similar notion was current. The other side of this coin was a style of biography which stressed the inspirational nobility of sacrifice, and the grace inherent in hard work without thought (or at least, serious hope) of advancement—a variant of romantic ideology.

The centrality and ideological context of individualism found in biographies is, Merz suggests, carried over in the biopic:

*The contract of biography is to deliver up a life—and whatever methods are used, whatever the personality described, its success or failure is judged on whether it creates a coherent personality.*⁴

Since the lives of any audience must necessarily be fraught with contradictions, the appeal of the biopic, its never ending ability to attract attention and money, must be seen to lie in part with the way that the biopic is inscribed with this reassuring coherence and unity. The subject

² Caroline Merz, *An Examination of Biography in Film and Television*, University of East Anglia, 1981.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Tavistock Publications, London 1972, p xx.

⁴ Caroline Merz, *op cit.*

may be changed by personal and interpersonal experiences, but an existential essence remains unquestioned. How does the biopic operate to construct this unitary individual? The problem, as the BFI's introduction to the event put it, is to establish how a closed discourse centering on the individual is constructed out of the open facts of a real life. At the level of narrative the biopic must order the discourse to fit a narrative pattern (crudely, stasis, disruption, closure), to have its main character struggling against adversity, and overcoming it. In the biopic, the individual subject needs to remain within the ambit of the ordinary, while at the same time the film is premised on the subject's extraordinariness, or at least the possession of an out of the ordinary talent. The biopic thus negotiates the tensions inherent in antimonies such as ordinary/special, destiny/circumstances, effort/talent, etc., negotiations which feed off and reflect wider cultural tensions.

It was frequently observed over the weekend that the narratives of Hollywood biopics tend to be linear and one dimensional. That is to say, they follow a more or less unproblematic historical trajectory of the individual towards the achievement by which he or she is best known to the public (Madame Curie to the discovery of radium and radiation poisoning, Buddy Holly to early stardom and untimely death, Lenny Bruce to obscenity trials and a drug overdose). Perhaps understandably, this simple narrative organisation left many people unsatisfied, and, together with the excessive length of some biopics, explained why many people said they did not 'like' biopics. Instead of complex plotting, most biopics offer an ordered series of

minor climactic moments as the individual triumphs over adversity, with that series firstly standing in for the formal interest of the narrative, and secondly attempting to overcome any problem that might be posed by an audience's fore-knowledge of what is to come, by introducing the suspense of how a particular problem will be overcome. It is doubtless true that this kind of suspense often occurs in other genres also, but in biopics it is raised with a particular repetitiveness and centrality.

In this ordering of moments into a narrative sequence, the biopic is in danger of undermining whatever authenticity it aspires to by signalling its own fictionalisation. One way around this problem, as Merz points out, is for the film actually to emphasise its own fictional nature, thereby freeing itself to arrange the 'facts' to suit itself. But another way might be to attempt to efface this fictionalisation by inclusion of 'spurious' facts (which may or may not be known by the audience), or jumps in the narrative to enhance the sense of authenticity. Both strategies seemed to be operating in films screened over the weekend. In a film like *The Buddy Holly Story*, the fictionalisation is stressed, and the emphasis is on the entertainment value of the music and performances (Gary Busey as Holly, as well as Buddy Holly via Busey) rather than authenticity. The second strategy is apparent in *Madame Curie* with the introduction of a second, till then unknown, daughter, Eve – an introduction which moreover seems to serve no function in the narrative, but is merely a reminder of the ambition of verisimilitude, indeed the very absence of narrative validation acts as evidence for the accuracy of the film.



Left, Gary Busey as Buddy Holly. Right, Sissy Spacek as Loretta Lynn.

This tension between fictionalisation and accuracy is the site for the ambiguous positioning of the spectator, viewing something which neither is Hollywood fiction nor operating within the familiar and safe parameters of documentary. The tenacity of referential emphasis is often most marked with showbiz stars who are the objects of popular memory or familiar film footage. Here the problem is open to resolution through the performance of an accomplished contemporary entertainer, working the routines or songs that belong to someone else—thus Diana Ross singing Billie Holiday in *Lady Sings the Blues*, or Sissy Spacek as Loretta Lynn in *Coal Miner's Daughter*, managed to reproduce, if not the original much loved noise, at least a rival set of audience pleasures.

What goes into or is left out of a biopic is determined not just by the structures of the film, but by its ideological project. *Madame Curie*, as an example of hagiography, would have foundered had it taken on board the scandal of her love affair. Instead the film shows Marie Curie always within the context of the normal and the respectable, providing interesting insights into the way a biography of an exceptional woman can be constructed and contained within a patriarchal culture. Marie Curie is presented as retaining her feminine qualities, remaining within the family as an exemplary wife and mother, while at the same time displaying the single-minded determination and goal-orientation that Hollywood posits as central to success.

Biopics are not outright pieces of fiction, but subtle restructurings of history. They humanise

by putting the individual's public and/or private life at the centre of the stage. The effect of structuring historical drama around the life of a famous person with whom we are invited to sympathise, is to suggest that history is produced by individual interventions, not complicated by such factors as class, institutions, social and economic organisation, etc. Realist strategies which locate history unproblematically in the human, or suggest that history resides in the subjectivity of its participants and their individuated perceptions of events, are incompatible with any materialist analysis. Biopics also suppress any notion of the social formation of their subject. Thus *Madame Curie* is typical in that it affords no explanation of how it was that a young woman of Polish origin came to acquire a sophisticated understanding of science at a young age in a Catholic country's education system.

The object of filmic reconstruction of the past, as in the biopic, must be to suggest meanings for the present. The nostalgic looking back to a past which is dimly remembered, or to another country, or to a fictionalised life completely different from our own, is reassuring because it leaves out the disturbances and discontent of our own present. Subjects get chosen for biopics as much because they fit into the dominant ideology, as for the intrinsic interest of the lives presented. Only if we come to the biopic with a theorised understanding of the past, and of what the biopic is doing, will we be able to avoid being left with a record of surface events not explained by reference to deeper structures, historical processes, unconscious motives, and



Marie Curie discovers radium... and checks the roast.

underlying causes that account for human activity at a far more basic and telling level than do the individual and conscious decisions we can observe. To begin to think seriously about the lives of the subjects of two recent biopics, John Reed (*Reds*), and Gandhi; the one committed to revolution in America, and the other who

believed in the necessity of a separate cultural identity for India removed from the influences of the West, is to begin to understand how their lives have been rendered safe and harmless by the way in which the industry has chosen to represent them.

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FILM, HISTORY AND WORLD WAR II

CAROLINE MERZ REFLECTS ON AN INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL EVENT

The April programme of Cinema City, the British Film Institute's Regional Film Theatre in Norwich, included two educational events. One event, on the representation of women, would have most likely be seen by teachers as a non-academic/general studies event, suitable for those who are not taking exams; a way of occupying students for a day. The other was in a more familiar mould: a 'set book screening' of Olivier's *Henry V*. No event or presentation was offered in connection with the film. There are accepted, common-sense ways for English teachers to use the screening: for painless revision of the text, and for discussion of how the film formally handles the text—how faithfully, how effectively, etc.

There is no equivalent in History teaching; film is still overwhelmingly aligned with Literature in schools, colleges and universities. The reasons for this situation are complex, but clearly the Leavis inheritance is at least partly responsible.

The February event¹ on World War II, at the same cinema, was an attempt to start to bridge that huge gap. Usefully, it drew attention to the wealth of material that exists from this period

and the enormous potential for using it in teaching. Frustratingly, it didn't attract a wide-ranging audience, or exploit that material systematically enough. The audience mainly consisted of two groups: History/Film students from the nearby University of East Anglia; and a number of film culture teachers and workers from around the country. Genuinely local participants were noticeably absent, although the event was actually designed to appeal to 'ordinary' non-film-culture people—school teachers, World War II veterans, other interested parties. If there's a lesson from the event, it is that an organisation like Cinema City needs to put more thought and resources into its educational strategy. 'Set book screenings' are merely public relations and (perhaps) profit-making practices unless teachers are encouraged and helped to approach the films in more than the traditionally inert ways. Equally, this more innovative history-related event couldn't be slotted into the programme in a similar take-it-or-leave-it way; it required solid promotional and follow-up work with teachers and local organisations at various levels.

Disappointing in the range of audience it attracted, the Norwich event nonetheless provided a lot of pointers to areas of work that could be developed. During World War II there was a massive volume of film-making with a

¹ 'A World War II Film Weekend', held at Cinema City, Norwich, February 26-27, 1983.

direct or indirect ideological purpose and always with an ideological interest. Government involvement in British film-making never achieved such a high level either before or since, and Hollywood too was very involved in the 'war effort'. Audiences in both countries were at their highest ever. The recent season on Channel 4 – *The Gathering Storm* – and recent books like *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*² are opening up the sheer intensity of Hollywood's engagement with the war effort in different ways – and the complexities of its negotiation with governments and audiences.

So: how to handle this manageably in one weekend? Two clear strategies suggest themselves: (1) a businesslike *overview* of World War II film-making, tracing various strands in production, the relationships of government and film-making and so on; or (2) an intensive case-study on a particular film or topic. The event, though it touched on both objectives, in fact did neither. It seemed perverse *not* to allude to any of those aspects of wartime film-making in Britain on which important work, in writing and teaching, is at least beginning to be done, and whose importance to the analysis of British Cinema has been established. Yet there was nothing from, or on, Ealing, or Powell/Pressburger; nothing on such films as *Millions Like Us* or *The Way Ahead*.³ And although the first day dealt largely with documentary, it scarcely referred to Humphrey Jennings.

But this eclecticism can also be seen as a strength in that it showed how much there is from this period that repays study. For the sake of clarity I'll go through them in order: (1) East Anglian Film Archive material, introduced by David Cleveland. This section concentrated on short films shown during World War II in local cinemas, plus amateur film of wartime activities, and was linked to a display of photographs in the cinema bar area. Unfortunately, the local audience that generally comes in droves to straight Archive events at Cinema City wasn't reached for this event – but – similar exhibitions could be mounted elsewhere (for example the display on Canterbury in

Canterbury City Library last year, which was very well organised). There is potential for handling the Archive material not just as a nostalgia trip but as an investigation of how popular memory operates, involving the experience and memory of those who were actually marked by the events of World War II and by the mediation of those events at the time and since. As it was, we saw some remarkable footage of *Blighty Messages*, part of a series of very simple films shot in camps in (in this case) Burma and shown in local cinemas. Soldiers spoke direct to camera with messages for family and friends.

(2) Personal testimony by film-makers. Harry Watt and Pat Jackson are two out of a fair number of those who were actively involved in the war film effort and are still living: both came to Norwich to talk about their general experience and about specific films, and both were highly articulate. Watt is the better known of the two, for films like *Night Mail* (for Grierson's GPO Unit) and *The Overlanders* and *Where No Vultures Fly* (for Ealing), and for his autobiography, *Don't Look at the Camera*⁴. Jackson's name and work is less familiar. His *Western Approaches* – shot in technicolor, largely at sea – is the most ambitious documentary drama of the war years and is a far more substantial film than Watt's *Target For Tonight*, but it was unlucky in two ways: first, it came out too late in the war to have as great a public impact and, second, it impressed MGM so much that they offered Jackson a Hollywood contract. Changes in the MGM management meant that when he arrived there nobody knew what to do with him, and he made only one film for them in the five post-war years (*Shadow On The Wall*). But Jackson had been out of the British industry for the crucial years from 1945 to 1950, and despite such work as the hospital drama *White Corridors* and some key episodes of TV's *The Prisoner* (1960s), he was never to re-establish himself fully.

In addition to *Western Approaches*, Jackson showed *Builders*, one of the Ministry of Information-sponsored five-minute shorts, made in 1942. This was as much of a revelation as the *Blighty Messages* films – partly because of the

² Allen Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*, Chicago, Nelson Hall, 1982.

³ Vincent Porter and Chaim Litewski, 'The Way Ahead', *Sign & Sound* Spring 1981, pp 110-116.

⁴ Harry Watt, *Don't Look at the Camera*, Paul Elek, 1974.

bold way in which, like them, it used direct address to the camera. Jackson outlined the very direct functional job the project had been asked to do – raising the morale of ordinary building workers – and the speed with which it had been shot and shown. Watt showed some comparable shorts from 1940: the already celebrated and well-documented *London Can Take It* (a despatch about the Blitz, for American audiences), plus *Dover Front Line* (reportage/interview) and *Squadron 992* (work with barrage balloons during the Phoney War period, designed very specifically, like *Builders*, as a morale-raiser for the men (sic) whose work was represented in the film).

Both Watt and Jackson stressed in practical terms the need at the time to do a practical job – i.e. to dramatisé the contribution of a *group* to a unified war effort. And they also emphasised the solidarity of the *group* of film-makers, often against the hostility of immediate officialdom. The documentary film effort was seen especially at the start of the war as in opposition to old-fashioned reactionary officialdom (in the Government and in the Services) and to the commercial film industry. And in so far as they admitted to any ‘theory’, there was a commitment to use ordinary people: a trust in the potential of ordinary people to do their bit *on film* just as they could do their bit in war. From this came the non-actor aesthetic, including the subjects being allowed to address the camera directly (as in *Builders* and *Western Approaches*). Films and projects like this, of course, raise central questions about the ideology of wartime and the implications of the job that these films were doing in creating such powerful images of group effort and unity – in the long term, are they progressive or reactionary?

It was useful to have these issues referred to specifically in the event’s documentation. Of the sources drawn on, one deserves a heading to itself:

(3) *Documentary News Letter* was published at monthly intervals throughout the war period. It’s continuous discussion of films and of film policy – theatrical as well as non-theatrical, features as well as shorts – make it indispensable for anyone investigating wartime cinema. It was more than just a voice for consensus and unity (of a coalition of documentary and fiction people analogous to the political coalition of the war

years) and often radical. Thus, it welcomed *Builders*: ‘It is a real treat to hear a sound track of working men talking with a feeling of independence’, but expressed reservations. ‘The film about the future of the country should tell us not what the working-man would like to have given him but what he feels he wants badly enough to go and get for himself’.⁵

By no means entirely written from this perspective, *Documentary News Letter* embodied conflicts and contradictions, and was itself a site for – to use the title of the forthcoming BFI summer school, ‘Struggles over the Meaning of World War II’. Here and elsewhere, *DNL* engaged with the issues that Raymond Williams refers to in *Politics and Letters*⁶, for instance in his discussion of the limitations of Orwell’s famous wartime essays on ‘social patriotism’. It is significant that Williams aligned himself with the left of the documentary movement in the person of Paul Rotha, with whom he was involved in an abortive film project at the end of the war – and Rotha himself was involved with *DNL*.

(4) The second half of the weekend was given over to a short case-study of the cinema’s representation of the Soviet Union as an Ally – ‘One of the funniest propaganda problems of the 1940’s and one of the most difficult’⁷. The short film screened was *Salute to the Red Army* for the Imperial War Museum, a useful newsreel record of the sheer volume of public celebration on Red Army Day in 1943. The film shows marches, crowds, public rallies and the generalised sentimentality with which Tory ministers celebrated the Soviet effort while taking care to steer the celebration into ‘unpolitical’ channels – a process which the two feature films shown repeated on a larger and more complex scale. Anthony Asquith’s *The Demi-Paradise* was screened on the first evening, and Charles Barr’s presentation on it the next morning stressed how the film ‘elides’ both historical *facts* – in this case the Nazi-Soviet pact – and *politics* – effectively de-politicising the Russian revolution in order to keep in line with official Government

⁵ *Documentary News Letter*, April 1942.

⁶ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, London, Verso, 1978.

⁷ ‘Our Soviet Friends’, *Propaganda with Facts* no 5, the British Broadcasting Corporation.

policy. Although the presentation was perhaps too compressed for reasons of time, Barr demonstrated clearly how *The Demi-Paradise* is a good example of propaganda operations and of an old-style cinema unaffected by any documentary trends: a useful reminder that such a cinema existed throughout the war years, and also a theoretical counterweight to the Watt and Jackson session.

Richard Crockatt's subsequent presentation on *Mission to Moscow* and its context in history and in the industry (making adept use of David Culbert's recently published annotated script) was valuable and interesting – rather more so in fact than the turgid and messy 'panorama' film he was talking about. From its American

standpoint, *Mission to Moscow* tries to show how the US and USSR are fighting for the same sort of aims, how there is no real difference in those countries' people 'underneath it all', just as *The Demi-Paradise* attempts to do in relation to Britain.

There is a lot of scope for developing the material which the weekend brought to light: no doubt some of it will be done through this year's BFI summer school. But perhaps the most urgent project is some serious 'oral history' work to be done with articulate survivors of the period, such as Watt and Jackson: something more rigorous and systematic than an event such as the Norwich weekend, by its nature, could provide.

ENCLITIC

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GOVERNMENTALITY

A PHOTO-TEXT WORK ON ADVERTISING

BY MITRA TABRIZIAN

Discussions of advertising within the advertising industry itself tend to concentrate on either the economic aspects of advertising or its social impact. As regards economics, some argue that advertising is an inevitable and essential part of a free enterprise system, guaranteeing its operational efficiency. On the other hand there are those who *object* to advertising on economic grounds, arguing that there are monopolistic tendencies inherent in advertising which lead to a progressive concentration of market power in the hands of large firms, and that this in turn leads to the creation of entry barriers for small firms such that the leading manufacturers gain the highest possible profit without attracting new competitors. Where the first view offers a model of advertising as a generator of competition, the second rejects it as an obstruction to precisely the same effect.

The debates on the social impact of advertising oscillate mainly between two poles: either advertising is considered to be a passive reflection of existing attitudes and values, or it is seen as the exploiter of those values. The most sophisticated arguments from people in the industry may go as far as to acknowledge the exploitation of existing values but never the creation of new ones. The logic here is that people only respond to what they already 'know' either consciously, their basic needs, or unconsciously, their deeply rooted 'wants', admittedly awakened by advertising. Needless to say these 'wants', crudely speaking, range from sexuality to 'materiality' and as far as the consumer's behaviour is concerned, are still problematic, since it is still not clear what a consumer really 'wants'! Such a dichotomy is also implicated in the distinction made between advertising as a means of information and advertising as a system of fantasy.

Raymond Williams describes advertising as being 'the consequence of a social failure to find means of public information and decision over a wide range of everyday economic life. This failure... is not abstract. It is the result of allowing control of the means of production and distribution to pass into minority hands... The most evident contradiction of late capitalism is between this controlling minority and a widely expectant majority.'¹ It is this gap between expectation and control which advertising responds to by a kind of organised fantasy. 'In economic terms this fantasy operates to project the production decisions of the major corporations as "your" choice, the "consumer's" selection of priorities, methods and styles.'²

What is at stake here is the question of ideology: advertising seen as not simply reflector or exploiter, but as one representational system among others (with its own specificity) which produces a subject; a subject who 'freely' accepts its subjection; a subject constituted in such a way that it conceives *itself* as constitutive. The subject here is defined not as an essence but as an *effect* of a process of signification. In this view individuals are not born, but *constituted* through the agency of representations. The so called ideological is specified and produced precisely in these practices of representation. Representations are neither reducible to a referent outside their process, nor to an origin in a subject. The real *then can neither be depicted in reflections nor via senses, negating the search for the truth of representation.* We should therefore not ask

¹ Raymond Williams, *Crisis in Communications* in Michael Barnes (ed), *The Three Faces of Advertising*, London, The Advertising Association, 1975, pp 30-31.

² *ibid*, p 31.

whether advertising informs or represents or misrepresents existing values but should rather open up the question of its effects. Definitions of reality are created within different discursive practices (e.g. advertising) at a particular point in time in a society. Struggles within ideology are struggles to change these definitions which have to be shifted if we are to create other 'forms of subjectivity'.

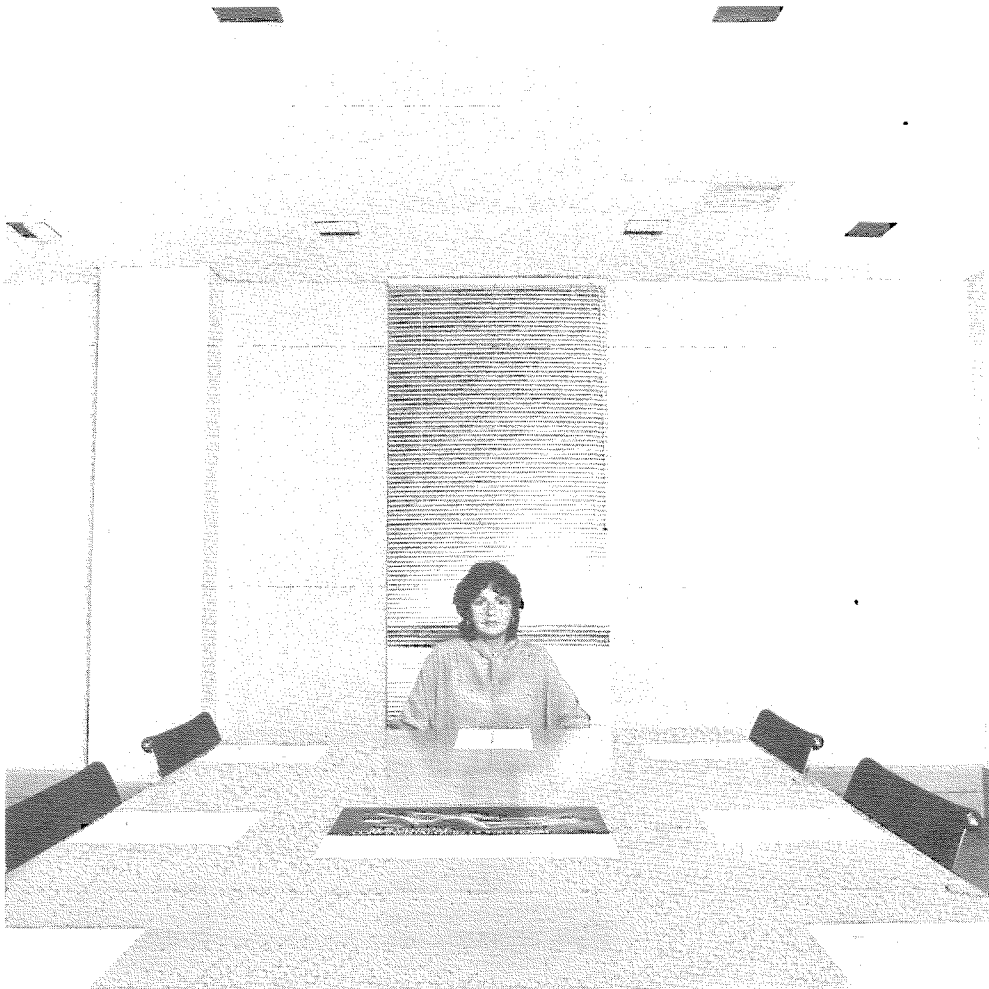
The work presented here is a fiction placed

within the documentary frame, it is at the intersection of two discursive practices: that of documentary photography and that of the discourse of advertising from which representative textual fragments are taken. (The photographs were taken in different advertising agencies, the written texts were not spoken by the people in the photographs, but selected from the pages of the *Journal of Advertising* and various books on marketing.)



we aim to create a system
which predicts
the unpredictable.

chairman



product positioning
is the most important decision.
successful products are ones
that have been remodified
so that they continue to satisfy contemporary needs.

vice-chairman



repetition does not influence the retention of the information
in any simple manner.
too frequent repetition may lead to resistance.
to avoid this, one has first to understand the conflict
between the requirements
for maximising the audience
and for establishing memory.

account director



simplify the order and structure;
present the story in consumer terms
not those of the product or manufacturer;
identify the consumer
and talk only to him.

account director



rationalism is a peculiarly narrow
rendering of reason.
rational communications,
from which the whole realm
of the *emotional* has been excluded,
accommodate but a fraction of
what constitutes human behaviour.

psychologist



the man with the proper imagination
is able to conceive of any commodity
in such a way
that it becomes an object of emotion to him
and to those to whom he imparts his picture,
and hence creates desire
rather than a mere feeling of ought.

psychologist



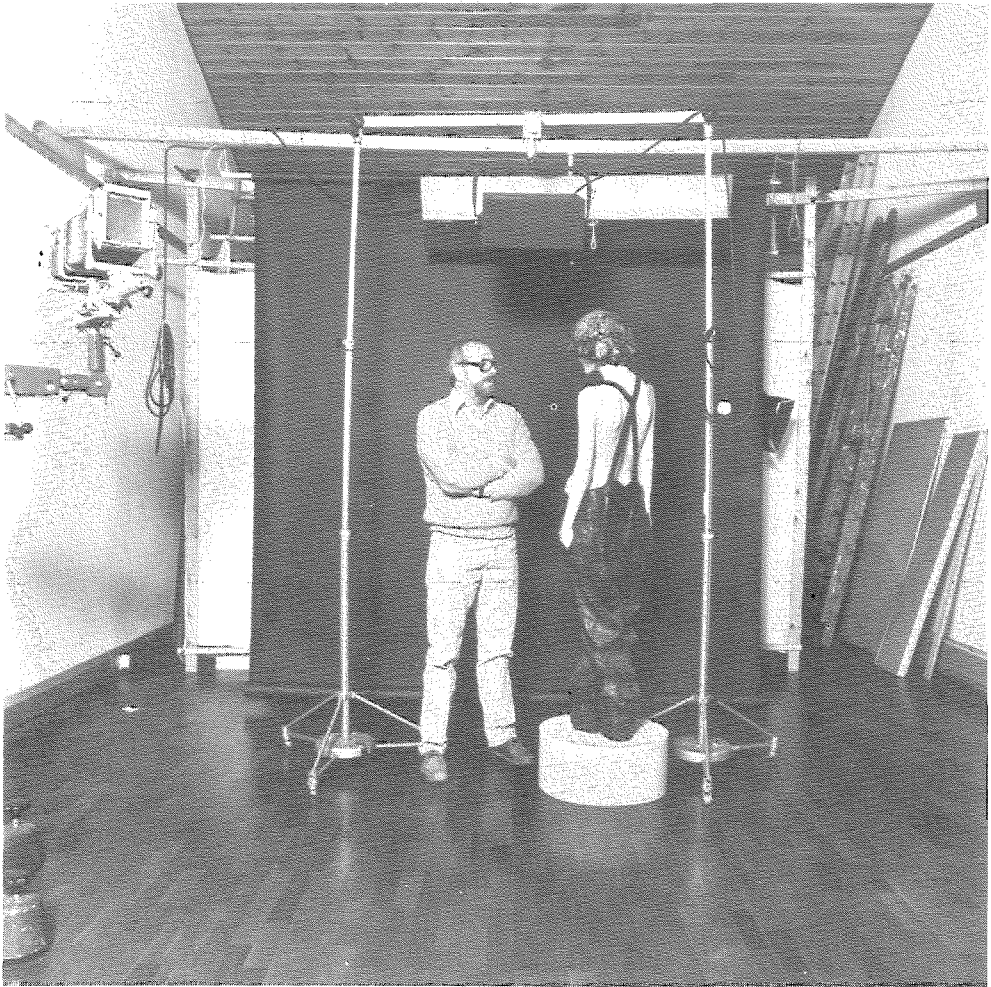
no conquest is possible without strategy.
human progress is a conquest
of the animal within us.

research director



... 'social prestige',
as well as others of a broad 'constellation' of instincts,
'beauty', 'acquisition', 'self-adornment'...
can be channelled
into the terms of the productive system,
to provide effective mass distribution of products.

research director



the psyche of the masses
is not receptive to anything that is weak.
it is like a woman
whose psychic state is determined
less by abstract reason
than by emotional longing for a strong force
which will complement her nature.

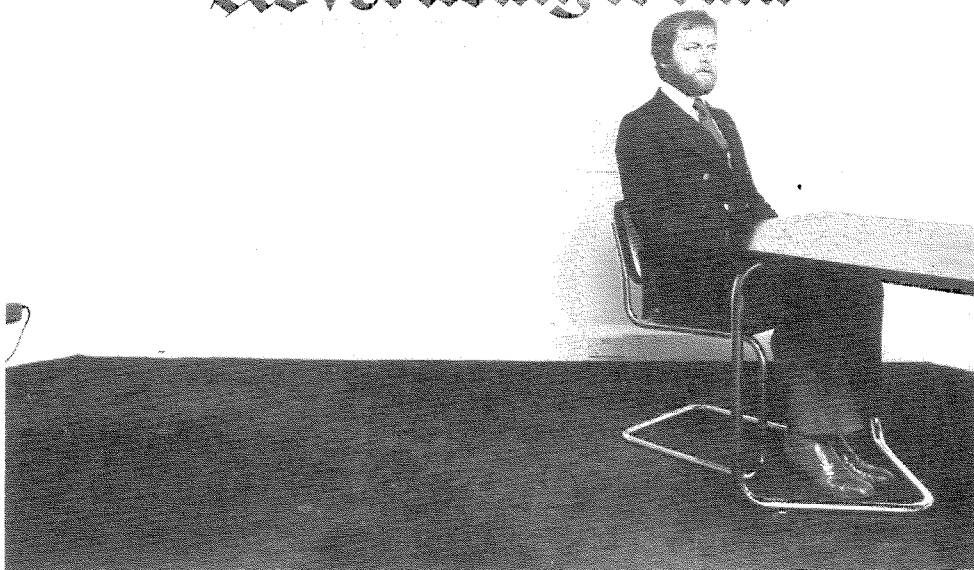
photographer



the power to detach and magnify,
to fix the momentary eminency of an object,
is the essence of rhetoric in the hands of
artists, orators and leaders of society.
this power
depends on the depth of the artist's insight
of that object he contemplates.

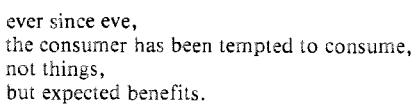
photographer

Advertising is fun!

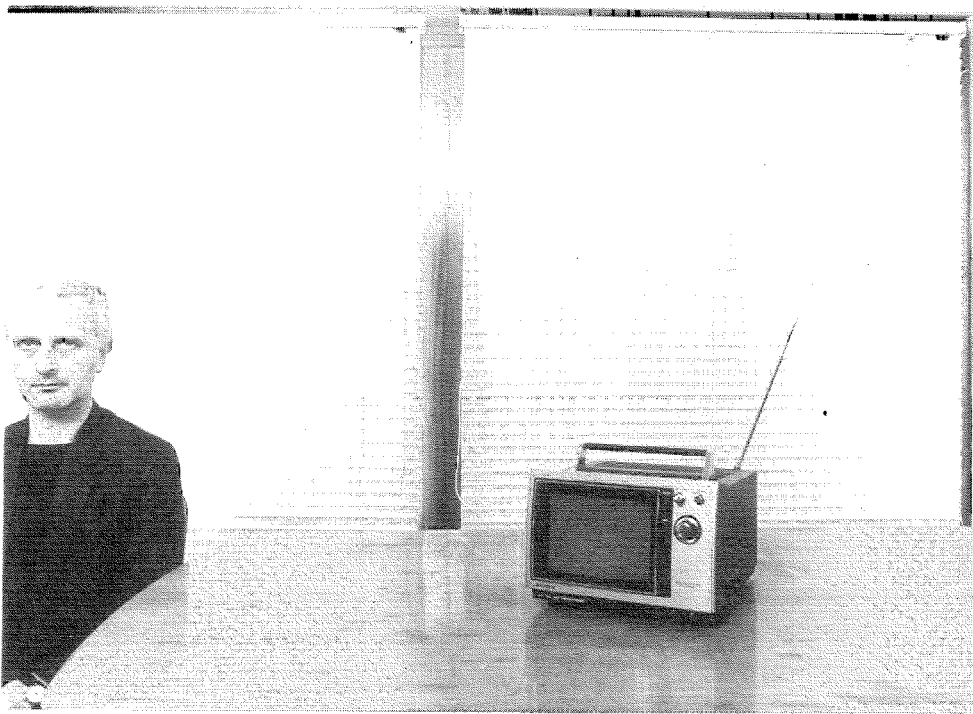


the sole preoccupation of yesterday's consumer
was possession.
today's ambition is pleasure;
to feel right in one's car
to feel right in one's blouse
to feel right in one's skin
to feel without guilt.

copywriter



copywriter



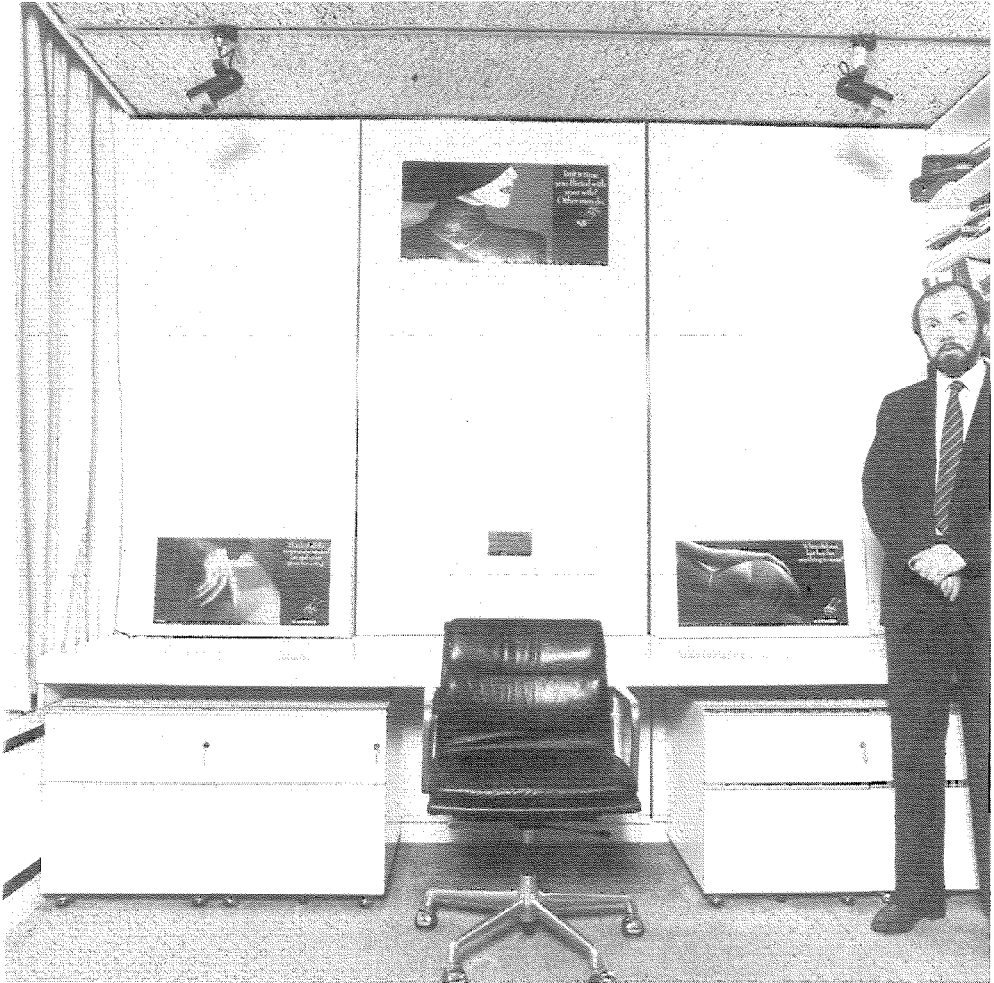
dilation indicates interest.
as the pupil expands or contracts
it reveals how intently an image is being examined.
the pupillometer, however, doesn't show
likes or dislikes.
it only signals interest.

art director



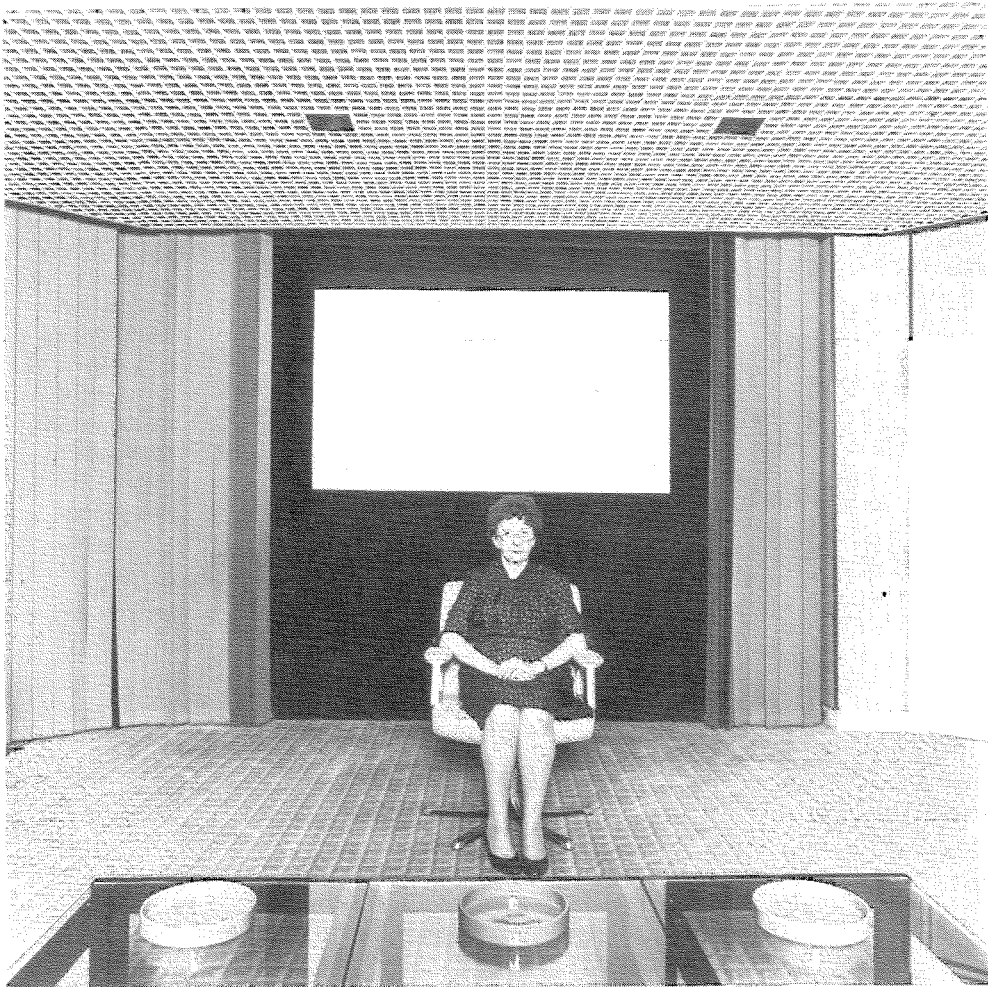
two nations which co-operate
are more likely to achieve economic prosperity
than either can achieve if they compete.
competition continues
because our feelings are not yet adapted
to our techniques.

art director



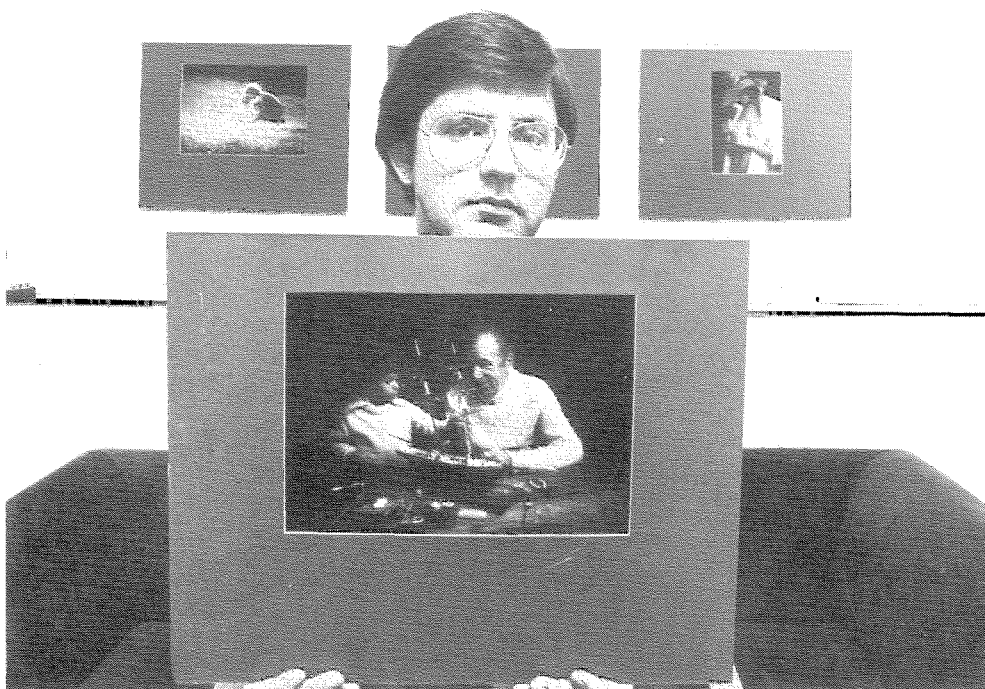
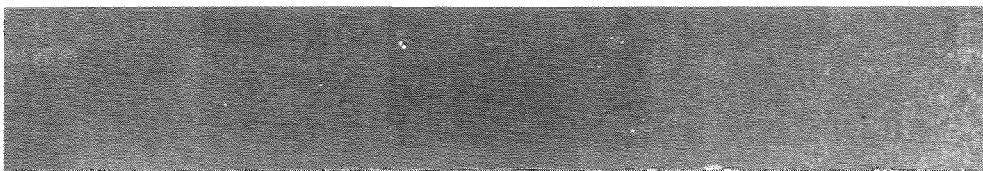
to produce a more informed people
has to be in the interests of society;
only informed people can exercise choice.

media director



only this way
could quantities be sold
which assures each person,
irrespective of status,
a degree of quality which in the past
could be assured only to royal houses.

media director



guide the people with governmental measures,
or regulate them by the threat of punishment,
and they will try to keep out of jail
but will have no sense of honour.
guide them by morals and principles of social responsibility
and they will have a sense of honour.

photo agent

LETTERS

From Peter Sainsbury, Head of Production, the British Film Institute, 29 Rathbone Street, London W1:

Felicity Oppé is currently a member of the BFI's Production Board; a fact curiously omitted from your 'Notes on Contributors' (vol 24 no 1). Jonathan Curling is currently making a film financed by the Production Board. The 'conversation' between them which you published in this issue should therefore have been well informed about the policy and practice of the Board.

Frank Abbott, an interview with whom you publish in the same issue, is very well known to both Felicity Oppé and Jonathan Curling. Both of them know that one of the two films discussed in the interview is also financed by the Production Board. Both of them also know that the relations of production and the conditions of financing applied to Curling's and Abbott's films bear no resemblance to the 'commercial model' described as the BFI Production Division's chosen methodology. They know that the Institute's financing of these films has not required their makers to 'abandon producer's control, choice of their own crew, control over editing (or) distribution'. They know that the sharing of distribution income applies only where commercial sales are made and largely to ensure that BFI can fulfil its obligations to trade unions regarding residuals payable in respect of commercial sales.

As former members of the ACTT Standing Committee on Independent Film and of the IFA Contracts Committee Oppé and Curling know that the Board can finance films on the basis of any of three different contracts only one of which might be likened to a 'commercial model' though it explicitly differs from such a model in crucial respects – including editorial control, copyright and revenue sharing. And they know that the Board is able and willing to finance productions under three different union Agreements; the full feature film agreement applicable to co-productions, the Code of Practice applicable to

films wholly financed by BFI and the Workshop Declaration applicable to BFI financed films produced by or through union enfranchised workshops.

The spectacular feat of intellectual dishonesty that allows Oppé and Curling to assert that BFI production is 'moving closer and closer to a commercial model' is matched only by that which enables them to say that BFI production policy is to become 'a state funder of art cinema'. This is true only if every film not akin to *Chariots of Fire* on one hand or to the tool of the social animateur on the other is an example of 'art cinema'. Of the nine films financed or part financed by BFI and currently in post production only one or possibly two can have any future in those few cinemas known as 'art houses'. And where a couple of BFI films have been successful in such cinemas, it can be very easily demonstrated that there is nothing remotely commercial in that success. It just means that more people see them.

The assertion that BFI Production is close to the concerns of Channel 4's *Film on Four* series is also palpable nonsense. Of seven BFI films so far programmed by Channel 4, six are for Felicity Oppé's *Eleventh Hour* series and one for *Film on Four*.

The intention of all the misinformation that you have published is to shift the locus of progressive independent film making away from the BFI and its Production Division and into the workshop movement. But less transparent propaganda will be needed to rewrite the BFI's record, which is one of preserving and developing the variety of independent film products against all kinds of pressures, the greatest of which is the well organised and partially successful demand that Production Division resources be redirected to workshop revenue and project funding. It is a record the workshops will have to emulate if their recent financial and political gains are not to fade into marginalisation within the national culture. And no amount of ostrich-like behaviour will abolish the central problem – that increasing varieties of film-making practice and endeavour have become legitimate subjects for subsidy, the workshop movement being only one of them.

Jonathan Curling and Felicity Oppé reply:

It seems to have escaped Peter Sainsbury's attention that our discussion was primarily concerned with two issues:

- 1) the impact of the Workshop Declaration on definitions of independent cinema;
- 2) the effect that inter-related funding institutions, the BFI and Channel 4, have on film-makers within the sector, especially in relation to contractual and employment issues.

Our article was attempting to point to tendencies in the institutions as they took up positions *vis-à-vis* the implementation of the Workshop Declaration. The Workshop Declaration has been used by the ACTT as a definition of independent film practice which guarantees the funding of work of a cultural and innovative nature, protects the rights of film-makers in stable employment, allows flexible crewing arrangements, ensures that profit is not individually distributed and protects the copyright and distribution rights of the group involved with the product. In order to maintain these definitions of independent film the ACTT withdrew the Code of Practice from the Production Division until such time as they could satisfy the ACTT that these definitions were being adhered to. As a result £200,000 was re-directed from the Production Division into the Regional Production Fund and the BFI agreed various other conditions. The Production Division was then allowed to operate under the Code of Practice and various provisional and final decisions were made at the Production Board meeting of April 22, 1983. Many independent film-makers saw this decision as the only guarantee of a place where low-budget fiction films of an innovative nature could be made by film-makers not working under the Workshop Declaration. It placed on the Production Board an enormous responsibility for redefining a subsidised film culture, where film-makers could work either outside of groups or away from the specificities of television.

It makes absolutely no sense to us to quote either Frank Abbott's or Jonathan Curling's films as examples of current BFI Production policy: both films were allocated funds at least eighteen months ago and during an era that pre-dated both Channel 4 and the Workshop Declaration. It also makes no sense to presume that the BFI

are to make no changes to their contracts in the light of recent events. The Production Board discussed draft contracts over a year ago but neither the IFA Contracts Committee nor the ACTT Standing Committee on Grant Aided Film have been party to any discussion or negotiation over proposed changes to existing contracts. Until the BFI institutes genuine mechanisms of democratic consultation, or at least makes use of mechanisms that both the IFA and the ACTT have initiated, then Sainsbury's accusations of the perpetuation of inaccurate information are unnervingly complacent.

In the light of the decisions made at the allocations meeting of April 22, we feel that our analysis of a tendency in funding policy at the BFI Production Department was neither alarmist nor inaccurate. Three out of the four feature films allocated funds at this meeting were provisional upon the script writer agreeing to find a director other than the one they nominated when the script was submitted. All four feature films were allocated less than half the money needed to make the film. The film-makers were thus placed in the extraordinary position of finding co-production money, finding a director and then signing the package over for the BFI to produce. In one case the production group in 'receipt' of funds were offered nothing more than the 'opportunity' of work for one camera lighting person and an assistant director on a film whose script writer explicitly wanted to work with the proposed director and production group. We are concerned with the implications these kinds of decisions have for a publicly funded sector and particularly with the way that the BFI as a privileged receiver of public funds then administers its role as a unique facilitator of low budget feature films. The Board's recent decisions make it unlikely that any feature film will be made under the Code of Practice this year. Film-makers will be obliged to look to commercial sources for co-production money if their films are to be made.

If these recent decisions are a real reflection of BFI Production Department policy (certainly there is nothing in the Institute's Five Year Plan which requires them), then no amount of harking back to the past or factual point scoring will alter the fundamentally political disagreements that we have with Peter Sainsbury.

**From Michael Chanan, 18 Moreland Court,
Finchley Road, London NW2:**

May I be allowed to correct two errors which have crept into Sue Aspinall's account of the Cuban Cinema Weekend School (vol 24 no 2)? The first is relatively trivial. She refers to two films mentioned in a *Jump Cut* article by John Hess – *Now It's Up to You* and *A Woman, A Man, a City*. The second she attributes to a director called Una Mujer. In fact both films are by the same director, Manuel Octavio Gomez – and *una mujer* is (rather ironically in the context of the article) Spanish for 'a woman'.

The second is more serious, concerning *De cierta manera* (*One Way or Another*). Following remarks in the article, you have featured a still from this film with a photo caption telling us that it's 'a critique of "machismo as underdevelopment" withheld by ICAIC for years'. Sue Aspinall's authority for this information is another *Jump Cut* article, this time by Julia Lesage. But the truth is more complicated. The director, Sara Gomez, died (of asthma) before the editing of the film was completed. Though it was then finished, as closely to her intentions as possible, by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Julio García Espinosa, this, however, obviously entailed delays. Furthermore, the film had been shot in 16mm and because of the lack of resources within ICAIC, the blow-up to 35mm for cinema release ran into severe technical difficulties (which can be seen in the available release print) which involved further delays, including having to get the work done abroad.

There are a handful of cases of Cuban films delayed before release, for a variety of reasons. There are also cases of ill-founded rumours circulating abroad about shady goings-on at ICAIC towards which we are frequently too gullible. Since in this case the film was completed by a couple of men from among ICAIC's founder members, whom Sue Aspinall disparages for their continued exercise of power, readers must decide for themselves to what extent the facts just offered may explain the delay in the film's release or whether there does have to be something suspect about it.

The question is connected with other points Sue Aspinall raises, where the problem is one of emphasis. She criticises the weakness of ICAIC's system of promotion, to which the lack of women directors may be ascribed. (There is currently one other woman director in ICAIC, a

documentarist.) It isn't true that the problem goes unrecognised, only that ICAIC sees it as a general problem, about how to expand the number of directors when there is no expansion in resources, and without having to leave people idle. They also see it as another situation that reflects the heritage of underdevelopment, for no one can be surprised that the first two generations of directors which ICAIC raised were men. The situation has persisted because positive discrimination is not part of Cuban revolutionary ideology. *Machismo*, like racism, is attacked in other forms. Why this should be belongs to the proper debate that Sue Aspinall calls for in her article, and of course this goes far beyond cinema.

It would be good to include in this debate also the criticism she makes of ICAIC's policy of apprenticeship through newsreel (and/or documentary, to be accurate) on the grounds that 'promotion depends on individual articulacy, persistence and ability to please the assessors'. The system has other aspects. Both ideologically and aesthetically it was devised to give Cuban film-makers a grounding in social reality at the same time as room to learn their trade, including the opportunity for modest experiment. It is a system devised for a country which has no film school and cannot afford one, just as the same conditions of blockaded development restrict the availability of non-professional film gear or video.

These are significant elements in the nature of Cuban film practice, which Sue Aspinall says we need to look at in its entirety, after warning that there's a dangerous tendency to assume that their experience is somehow more 'real' than our own. But if there is such a tendency, where does it come from? Perhaps from looking at Cuban reality from outside, without trying to enter into it, vicariously (in the positive sense of the word), with empathy. As soon as you do this, however, many of your cultural susceptibilities come to be questioned, you experience gestalt switches, both intellectual and emotional. Cuban cinema is not just a body of films, it is the creation, construction, moulding and projection of a world, conscientious about the privilege and authority it enjoys in the process. It is not a question of thinking of this world as more 'real' than ours, but of questioning our assumptions of how 'reality' works – especially the reality of a socialist revolution in a third world country,

when our most familiar model of revolutionary reality is the misleading version of the USSR and Eastern Europe we've had to cobble together through the haze of media disinformation and mythologised marxisms.

Sue Aspinall replies:

Although I may well have been misinformed about the cause of delays in releasing *One Way or Another*, Michael Chanan himself clearly stated at the weekend school that decisions *were* sometimes taken not to release films, for political reasons. Therefore I don't think it's unreasonable to be suspicious when the only feature film in two decades of Cuban cinema to be made by a woman, is not released for three years.

What seems to me to be at the heart of the disagreement between myself and Michael Chanan is the question of how much faith or scepticism is appropriate in relation to the Cuban film industry. To me, ICAIC's failure to promote women as directors (as in Britain, women are numerous only in the support structures of the industry) is a *political* failure which, after more than twenty years of revolutionary government, cannot be shrugged away as an 'inherited' problem. Michael Chanan's 'gestalt switches' are evidence of an identification with the Cuban government and its film industry to a degree which I find unacceptable. Whilst I too admire and support the Cuban revolution, I cannot justify or ignore the absence of feminism and libertarianism which has so far characterised the Cuban revolutionary process, and which is evident both in the organisation of the Cuban film industry and in its films.

(Editor's note: *The erroneous attribution of 'Una Mujer' was mine, not the author's.*)

From Jim Cook, BFI Education Department, 81 Dean Street, London W1:

As one of its film study material resources for teachers BFI Education has produced for a number of years now sets of slides from feature films and accompanying Study Notes. To date 42 such sets exist but beyond noting rates of sales and receiving occasional verbal feedback we have no real way of knowing what use teachers make of them nor of how valuable they find

them. In this situation any comment is welcome.

In the specific instance of Bruce Babington's comments on the *Carrie* notes (vol 24 no 3), I should say that I welcome his insistence on the importance of genre, which I think I underemphasised in the notes at the expense of over-emphasising structural incoherence. I still however stand by the notion of 'display' in particular and generally by a structure for the notes which:

(a) attempts to describe the strengths and weaknesses of auteurist, feminist and structuralist insights in relation to the film and offers bibliographic references for *all* of the positions;

(b) draws on these positions to offer a commentary on the slides aimed precisely at indicating the *heterogeneity* of elements in the film.

To intertextually connote a flicker of meaning from the dying Lee Marvin at the end of Siegel's *The Killers*, 'I haven't the time' to refute or debate the details of Babington's critique, and anyway presumably teachers using the slides and notes (both his and mine) will be better placed than me to assess their pedagogic usefulness.

It is worthwhile pointing out, however, that it is precisely on these latter terms that the slide notes need to be assessed, and that far from picking off the opposition in some academic skirmishing war of position whose citadel is 'the-truth-about-*Carrie*', the materials are designed, through offering elements of a reading, to raise problems and issues for discussion.